# A Marriage Above Zero.

BY NEVADA.

Price 50 Cents.

# *Mrs. Mary J. Holmes' Novels*

## Over a MILLION Sold.

*THE NEW BOOK*

# MARGUERITE

JUST OUT.

"As a writer of domestic stories which are extremely interesting without being extravagant, Mrs. Mary J. Holmes is unrivalled. Her characters are true to life, many of them are quaint, and all are so admirably delineated that their conduct and peculiarities make an enduring impression upon the reader's memory."

The following is a list of Mary J. Holmes' Novels:

TEMPEST AND SUNSHINE.
ENGLISH ORPHANS.
HOMESTEAD ON THE HILLSIDE.
'LENA RIVERS.
MEADOW BROOK.
DORA DEANE.
COUSIN MAUDE.
MARIAN GREY.
EDITH LYLE.
DAISY THORNTON.
CHATEAU D'OR.
QUEENIE HETHERTON.
DARKNESS AND DAYLIGHT.
HUGH WORTHINGTON.
CAMERON PRIDE.
ROSE MATHER.
GRETCHEN.
ETHELYN'S MISTAKE.
MILLBANK.
EDNA BROWNING.
WEST LAWN.
MILDRED.
FORREST HOUSE.
MADELINE.
CHRISTMAS STORIES.
BESSIE'S FORTUNE.
MARGUERITE.

All handsomely printed and bound in cloth, sold everywhere, and sent by mail, postage free, on receipt of price ($1.50), by

## G. W. DILLINGHAM, Publisher,

SUCCESSOR TO

G. W. CARLETON & COMPANY,

33 WEST 23rd STREET, NEW YORK.

# A MARRIAGE ABOVE ZERO.

A Novel.

BY

NEVADA.

NEW YORK:
COPYRIGHT, 1894, BY
*G. W. Dillingham, Publisher,*
SUCCESSOR TO G. W. CARLETON & CO.
MDCCCXCIV.
[*All Rights Reserved.*]

# CONTENTS.


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| I. | Thomas Haddon, Jr. | 9 |
| II. | Aimée St. Clair | 21 |
| III. | Good-bye | 36 |
| IV. | The Song-bird of the Seminary | 45 |
| V. | The Introduction | 52 |
| VI. | Love | 65 |
| VII. | Russell Romera | 74 |
| VIII. | The Meeting | 79 |
| IX. | Was it Love? | 86 |
| X. | The Defeat of Prudence | 91 |
| XI. | His Letter | 100 |
| XII. | Success and Ardor | 115 |
| XIII. | The "First Night" in New York | 128 |
| XIV. | The Fatal Letter | 140 |
| XV. | The Interview | 152 |
| XVI. | Disenchantment | 171 |
| XVII. | Hate and its Terminus | 181 |
| XVIII. | Bitter Reality | 188 |
| XIX. | Reggio Dealry | 193 |
| XX. | Fame and Sorrow | 206 |

| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| XXI. | The Visit to the Home of Her Childhood . . . . | 210 |
| XXII. | Discovery . . . . . | 223 |
| XXIII. | The Land of Love, Mexico . | 235 |
| XXIV. | Aimée's Father . . . . | 248 |
| XXV. | Aimée's Mother . . . . | 254 |
| XXVI. | Revelation . . . . . | 267 |
| XXVII. | Bessie Earl . . . . . | 273 |
| XXVIII. | Conclusion . . . . . | 278 |

# PREFACE.

This is a story of life. Romera still lives. Aimée, having made her name immortal, died in the zenith of her fame, only a short time ago. The discovery of her parentage is all absolutely true.

The writer has endeavored to portray vividly all the emotions and internal conflicts of the two hearts. If anything seems at first reading unreal, read again, and endeavor to apply it to yourself, put yourself in a similar position or place, and see if the reality does not blossom for you.

See if the conflict of a man of honor with his first powerful love is not heroic.

Forgive the impulsive Aimée when you read of her pathetic return to the home of her childhood, and her broken-hearted prayers, wild, but intense and fervid.

The writer has portrayed nature—has pictured lives. "But," you say, "one place Romera loves Aimée, or Aimée loves Romera, and in the next emotional utterance they say just the contrary."

Exactly as it is in life! When strongly moved, persons scarcely know what they say—when still more strongly moved, they scarcely know what they think.

Aimée, in the depths of her despairing prayers, prayed precisely as incoherently as a young nineteenth century girl of to-day would, under like circumstances.

It is no small, every-day, weak emotion improperly called love, but the grand, noble passion of two great souls.

The book is not intended for the masses—they could not understand it in a thousand years.

# A MARRIAGE ABOVE ZERO.

## CHAPTER I.

### THOMAS HADDON, JR.

"At first he seemed a child of cheerful yesterdays,
And confident to-morrows."

In the county of Norfolk, England, in a rambling, beautiful and historical old mansion called Haddon Hall, lived Sir Thomas Haddon and his wife Margaret. Like the "Blumine" of Sartor Resartus, this lady was fair complexioned, softly elegant, softly grave, witty and comely. Such a charming, respected and happy couple was the black-haired aristocrat, and his fresh-faced Saxon wife, that people in the village were wont to say to strangers who inquired for the famous Hall, "Walk up that hill in the early evening until you meet the handsomest couple you ever saw, and follow them. That's Sir Thomas and Lady Margaret."

Sir Thomas belonged to the landed gentry; his estate was large, and he lived his life through with no knowledge or thought of those economic questions which prematurely age most men of to-day. For his large family of boys, splendid healthy fellows, with the best blood of England in them, and for his golden-haired daughter, Polly, the best of tutors were employed.

In the year 1852 a beautiful, black-eyed, chubby baby was born at Haddon Hall. As he grew he proved to be the best-natured child possible, and so remarkably different from the others that they loved him accordingly. He had a smile, at the age of eight, which the proud mother was wont to call his "thousand guinea grin," and which could win him anything. And so he grew, happy in his youthful vocations; and knowing nothing of life, outside of his father's estate, until 1862, when Sir Thomas was found dead in his bed. His affairs were in a deplorable condition, which necessitated the immediate sacrifice of everything to the creditors, who swarmed like buzzards to the battle-field after a Napoleonic victory.

The grandfather of the deceased gentleman had distinguished himself as a scholar, compiled an English dictionary, and written an English grammar long used in all the schools and academies throughout the country. He died at

the age of eighty-nine, and was buried with great ceremony in one of the old English cathedrals. His only son, the father of Sir Thomas, inherited the same astute mind, which, because of the condition of his country during his development and education, led him into politics and Parliament.

At the age of ten, when his father died, the baby boy of Lady Margaret was good to look at. He had soft shining eyes, and the most remarkable silky hair. His clothes were, as yet, still of velvet, with broad cuffs and collars, and he was an extraordinary child in more ways than one. He had, for example, a way of grasping things, understanding and divining situations, that would have been remarkable in a much older child. In short, he gave evidence of a great mind.

Lady Margaret was prostrated by grief, and her eldest son, James, took a humble home for his mother and Polly, then went into law with the vigor of necessity, backed by love and youth, which speedily won him success and fortune. The others, being old enough and well equipped mentally, were well started by friends of Sir Thomas, except the youngest. He, of course, lived with Lady Margaret for a year. Then he went to her side one day and laying his soft, smooth cheek against hers, told her in his child-

ish way that he felt his dependence. "Of course," he said, "I'm not very old, but I see James has enough to take care of without me, and it isn't right for me to stay here." The mother did not let him say more, but smiled her sad smile and caressed the wonderful silky hair. "You are only a baby," she said, taking him in her lap and passionately hugging him to her—"my lovely baby and the image of your father; now, be good," and she kissed him again and again. "You must not think such naughty thoughts."

But a week passed, and the thing still weighed on his mind. He had saved up a little money—a very little, however, but still enough, he knew, to get to London; and thither he went.

The anxiety and labor of starting, and his long walk to the station, so tired the little fellow that he fell asleep almost as soon as the train started. He had a bag containing a half-dozen beautiful Irish point cuffs and collars, another velvet suit, a pair of soft felt slippers, and wrapped round these, an embroidered flannel night-dress. With this outfit, and what would be equal to about twenty-five cents of our money, he entered the world's metropolis—a boy, a mere lad, who had never before seen a city.

He felt lost among the crowds and noises as he got off the train, and his first impulse was to cry.

He was hungry and dazed, but it never occurred to him to go back. A great big fellow in a high white hat, pompous and pleased with himself, accidentally knocked his bag out of his hand with a big cane, and while the little fellow was picking it up, someone's coat brushed his hat from his head, exposing his hair, which was long, and fell in jetty ringlets, like finest floss, over his shoulders.

"Better be careful, youngster, or you'll get killed." He was a dirty-faced boot-black who spoke, but the boy had never heard so welcome a voice. "'Ere, sit down 'ere," he continued, pushing his box toward the child. He set down, the precious bag by his side, and began to brush the dirt from his cap, and to think. As he was debating as to whether he should ask this boy to let him help shine, or go to the Bank of England (he had heard his father speak of that as the store-house for money), a boy came by selling hot rolls, cakes and fruit. Thomas looked hungrily at them, and asked for some, giving all the money he had in exchange for all he could eat. Then he tried to learn the trade of boot-black by practising on his own pretty shoes, but when, after vigorous rubbing, and after getting his white cuffs soiled, the shoes looked worse than when he began, he told the boy he thought he would go on to the Bank.

"W'at Bank?" the boot-black asked.

"The Queen's Bank where the money is kept," replied the lad. "Why, don't you know," he went on, in a contemptuous tone of voice, "there is so much money there, that they have to keep a guard to watch it?"

While this conversation was going on, a stranger dressed in a suit of dull tweed, listened with a twinkle in his eye, and seeing that the sturdy little fellow was a gentleman's son, and suspecting at once the state of affairs, stepped to him and said:

"My boy, I'll take you to the Bank, if you want to go." Thomas looked up and saw the man in the white hat, who had been the cause of his misfortune upon leaving the train.

"Oh," the stranger continued, "you're that little chap," evidently also recalling the episode.

The child was not malicious, and liked the idea of going with such a big man. Besides, he thought of his money being all gone and told the man about it. So he forgave the injury done his cap.

"That's all right. You just come with me and I'll take you to dinner and you can tell me all about yourself, and where you came from." They got into a cab, and it seemed only a short time to the busy, thinking boy until they stopped in front of a great prison-like and windowless stone building, and crowds of hurrying people.

He felt sorry there were so many people ; he had not expected that. The cab stopped and he eagerly jumped out, and the man handed him his bag. Then the horses started away at a fearful pace before the stranger could join him, and they never met again.

And so he was there alone in London! What did he do? Why, the genius of his ancestors had descended to this well-bred, fine-haired English boy, and he began to think in earnest.

He did not then know that the low-browed, massive, soot-covered structure, without even a window to its outer walls, that gigantic strong box covering four acres in the very heart of London—he did not know that it had a life blood of its own which regulated the pulse of the financial world, and that it had at least one hundred and twenty-five millions of dollars in bullion alone ; consequently, he did not look upon it with the awe he would, had he known that what was done there would be felt in the antipodes. But he did sit down to think in its dull gray shadows. To him it was a massive, stately, dirty building, and he wondered why they had built up all the windows, and how they could see without them. There he sat on the curbstone, his head on his hand, and elbows on his knees, the soft curls caressing his fingers and temples as if animated. Perhaps they were. Why should not the first

intense thought of a child affect the sensitive exterior?

But actions are much influenced by surroundings and trifling circumstances. And so it happened that while the wholesome looking little fellow, with one cuff soiled, and his bag by his side, sat looking intently at the gloomy building before him, a young man of the Dick Swiveller order approached him, sat down, and commenced a conversation. He was good-natured and garrulous, and into the child's receptive mind he poured tale after tale of that wonderful country called America. How great, gigantic fortunes were made there. All the questions asked by the eager little fellow, Heman (that was his name) answered much as if he were an agent sent out to boom America.

"He told the child that he was going to Liverpool early the next morning, and from there sail to a place called New York, in this same America, and he asked the boy if he did not want to go along, telling him that he might as well, as he could travel to Liverpool on his ticket, free of charge, and then they would both have to work their passage across the ocean."

Thomas Haddon, Jr., had not many years of schooling, but he knew where America was far better than this rustic swag, cane and all. He knew it was very far from his mother, and across

a great ocean of water from England, so he hesitated, and told the sportive Mr. Heman that he had not expected to go any farther than London, but if money was plentiful in America, and they could get there, he was not afraid to start.

Pretty plucky for a youngster, was Thomas, and the companion of his voyage never knew what that quick decision had cost; what a struggle with the childish affection for the land of his birth and, above all, his mother. But he thought he would soon return and make her rich and happy, perhaps take her with him to America some day if it was really such a beautiful country.

The story of his voyage, his life in the strange country, his desertion by Heman, who joined a circus, is a tale of great suffering and hardship; it is the struggle of a child against his inevitable failure. At the age of fourteen, he felt that he was no longer capable of sustaining his ambition. Everything seemed to have gone wrong with him. He would have to give it up. He would not return to England, even if he had passage money. Never could he, child as he was, acknowledge all to his mother, what he had expected, and how he had failed. He had lost all interest in life, thrown as he was in the family of an illiterate, coarse, New England farmer. Every fibre in his strong body was against such

a life, and yet it meant existence to him. The worst thought of all, however, was that he was not being educated. When he had mentioned to the surly old farmer that he would like to attend the school if possible, he had been rebuffed, and refused permission. Then it was this remarkable and strange boy decided conclusively to change his name. Never should the proud name of his father be shamed or degraded by him. About this time, when his mind was in such a tumult, the old farmer found him one day almost buried in the straw stack, reading a newspaper. It was after working hours, but the brutal German somehow did not like the boy, especially since he had expressed a desire for knowledge; that was against his principles; so he took the paper roughly from the lad, and forbade his ever reading another.

That night Thomas started, and three weeks later an old Quaker living in the Katterskills engaged a hungry looking lad, called *Russell Romera*, to work for his board and clothes. The latter he needed very much. The reminiscence of his appearance on that auspicious day, amused the Romera of forty. He wore, as he related afterward, what had once been boots, but which were at that time little more than uppers and heels. A remarkable pair of trousers with gray and brown checks fully four inches square, the

former property of his recent employer, gave strange picturesqueness to the tight-fitting, short sleeved coat of peculiar green and yellowish brown reaching little more than half-way down his back, and exposing the coarse gingham shirt. He had carried wood one whole day for the coat the week before, when it had suddenly turned cold, and he had no place to sleep save outdoors. Add to this, very fine and glossy hair, so wonderful in its quality that the old Quaker asked him what he put on it, now grown long and surmounted by a torn felt hat of almost any, or every shape, a frank, open face and smooth cheeks, a little hungry despair in the fiery black eyes, grown almost fierce in the four years, and you will have the portrait of Russell Romera, aged fourteen.

The Quaker sent him to school, and the great politician, ten years later, did not forget it. He was permitted to read whenever he had finished his work, and often aloud to the good old man. The news of the nation was what interested him, and before he was seventeen, the county in which he lived had heard of his extraordinary ability to make political talks at campaign-meetings in school-houses, etc., and he was called "The Orator," by boys his own age.

From that time, his career was marvelous. He went right to the top by great bounds. His

mind was clear, and his intellect keen. He did not have to be told results—he seemed rather to divine them. The financial policy of each President from Washington down, he knew perfectly well—had made a study of every one. At twenty-one he stood where most financiers do at thirty-five, or even forty.

In the same year that Russell Romera was elected to the State Legislature, and married, another important event was happening thousands of miles away. A laughing infant, with all the pomp of royalty, was christened in the National Palace of Mexico, where four hundred years before had stood the Aztec temple.

*And the name the holy father spoke was* AIMÉE.

A strange world truly!

## CHAPTER II.

### AIMÉE ST. CLAIR.

"Sweet childish days, that were as long
As twenty days are now."

—WORDSWORTH.

"Hers the sweetest of all faces,
Hers the tenderest eyes of all;
In her hair she had the traces
Of a heavenly coronal,
Bringing sunshine to sad places
Where the sunlight could not fall."

*Pygmalion in Cyprus.*

A haughty head of short auburn curls, remarkably tinged with a halo of gold on each ringlet; hair parted in the middle with nature's own waves on either side. A skin of exquisite flawless whiteness, with rosy checks and lips; big laughing eyes of deepest blue, clear and brilliant. A most beautiful child; a school-girl of fourteen walking railroad ties back of a great overgrown hedge, and trying, when no one was in sight, to learn to whistle. One ring of her book-bag, the one that was engraved with her name, Aimée, had been taken off and slipped

over the slender hand to ornament the plump wrist; the other confined the one book in the bag, which was flung carelessly over her shoulder. She was dressed in a pretty black velvet school-dress with plain white linen cuffs almost to the elbow, and broad rounding collar; the black velvet Tam O'Shanter waved irregularly up and down in her hand as she balanced herself upon the narrow rails. The short dress exposed a girlish ankle and small foot clad in the finest and softest sixteen-button boots, with silk tassels.

"I *will*," she said aloud to herself, as she compressed the pretty lips, "I *will* walk without falling off the rail as far as the lower gate, and I *will* whistle, without drawing in instead of blowing out," and again she puffed her cheeks and tried for what seemed to her the hundredth time.

Half an hour later she was lying in a hammock under an apple-tree, on a big black fur carriage robe. Malta, a fine maltese cat, was nestled in her arms, and a complacent St. Bernard dog was helping himself to the contents of a neglected box of chocolate almonds on the velvety lawn beneath. She was reading "Middlemarch" and *whistling* softly to herself. An hour later and the cat got up, stretched herself, jumped down and walked lazily away toward the mansion. The dog watched her, and, having rested

long enough after his repast, followed her example and gave a barking yawn. He had only gone a rod when he found his mistress was not with him, and with a bound and a run he was at her side and licking her hand. She tipped herself out of the hammock, smiling at him in a most abstracted way, for the spell of George Elliot's masterpiece was yet upon her, and they together ran through the vista of the trees in the mellow light of the setting sun's last rays.

This was pretty, proud Aimée St. Clair. At least that was the name everybody gave her, for she had always lived at the St. Clairs' ever since that gentleman had bought the rarest old homestead in the county and brought his family there to live since ten years before. It was an immense estate, and St. Clair was rich and enjoyed it. He was exclusive, happy and contented. His family was large, and Aimée grew up following her own inclinations. She had a maid, a black woman of middle age, and the family tutor, as did the other girls, but she wanted to go to the public school also—wanted to "study all day and graduate," she explained, and they finally reluctantly consented, thinking it one of her strange caprices, as she had never been at all like the others—not even in appearance—a fact which had always been a subject of remark, sometimes

outside of the family. The other children were decidedly dark, as were the parents, with black eyes, and were inclined to be very large. They all spoke of Aimée as the odd one; sometimes the elder girls called her a freak, if they were anxious to be rid of her for several days. But the child was incapable of holding malice long, and at the end of two or three days she would forget all about the affair and join them as smiling and sweet as ever. Only sometimes by herself she cried, and she could not have told why.

Aimée St. Clair was not a prodigy at all. None of her day teachers would have said such a thing in their most gushing moments, but she was bright and loved the obscure. Hence, was a quick memorizer. And so it happened that she was to graduate the day after that on which the story opens; to graduate from a four years' high school course. Not that she knew the contents of her philosophy text-book—not that she could prove every theorem in her geometry, or solve every arithmetical problem; she could not. True, she had passed all her examinations, and creditably, but it had been by constant memorizing for daily lessons, and by prodigious cramming the night before the examination tests occurred. Her memory was well-nigh marvelous from much reading and relating of stories and fairy tales ever since her childhood. And so it was,

that although she knew absolutely nothing about latent and specific heat, nothing about logarithms, and less of trigonometry and chemistry, her mind being too young to grasp these things, she wrote well of them, and was awarded the valedictorian honor. Mythology and astronomy she knew, and her geology lectures had not been entirely mechanical; while she spoke Spanish beautifully, having been taught that at home, by the tutor, who saw that she took to it with great ease and quite naturally. The other girls studied German and recited Latin when unavoidable, but Aimée would not speak the former, declaring it to be ugly.

This was one of the most remarkable traits of her nature. The intense dislike and intolerance of anything deformed, or hideous, or sickly. Once a miserable, poor, sore-eyed, dirty, striped kitten came about the premises. Aimée was lying on the lawn singing to the mythical beings in the clouds and, strangely enough, in Spanish, when she first saw it trying to crawl up a tree near by. She rose quickly and her eyes flashed instantaneous hatred. She looked at the horrid creature a minute, and then ran away. No one else had noticed the new comer, but for two days its repulsiveness haunted this child, little more than a baby then. The very next time she happened to see it, she got one of the little

darkies about the place to put it under a box for her, just back of a big brick oven. Then as soon as he had scampered away, she took a small garden hoe and dug a hole about six inches deep in the ash pile, and pushing the box over it with no little dexterity, dropped the sickly animal into its shallow grave. She then covered it over, and as she saw the dry ashes move, and heard a cross "mew," ran to the well and poured cup after cup of water on the mound, patting it solid with the hoe. The ashes ceased to move, and, sticking her fingers in her ears, she ran to the play-room and was soon put to bed.

It so happened that the nursery was on the same side of the house as the scene of her operations, some rods away. Twilight had fallen and all was still. While being undressed the strange child thought she heard again a faint "mew, mew;" and almost crying she asked the nurse please to hurry. As soon as left alone, apparently asleep, she got up in her white Mother Hubbard night-dress and tip-toed barefoot through one of the long windows across the back piazza, and over the lawn to the old oven. The ashes hurt her feet cruelly, but she could not sleep with that horrid thing alive, so she took the hoe and dug it up. It was now a fearful sight indeed, and trembling like her little heart, she chopped it in pieces with the hoe and ran

back in terror through the main hall and into the drawing-room, where she told the grown folks all, and nurse carried her back to her cot and bathed the bruised feet and splintered hands. A tiny drop of blood on the night-gown almost threw her into convulsions, but she was finally lulled to sleep by a fairy-tale.

Another time she had carried a big tomato worm, the first she had ever seen, from the garden on a shovel, to the servants' kitchen, where there was always a big open fire, and had roasted it over the livid coals, believing it was Satan because it had a horn, and laughing at its writhings and contortions. When they had ceased, she dropped the shovel and ran out to play, but came solemnly back in about half an hour and hung to the cook's apron begging her to hunt for it in the ashes and let her bury Satan.

At the age of four, when the St. Clairs were at their country home in the summer, one of the servants gave Aimée several chickens, five or six little ones, just to please her, and the child seemed to love them. But one day, as she stood swinging her hat and dancing around her pets, Ethel, one of the grown daughters, went to her, and catching her up in her arms and kissing her dimpled face (the sweet little thing had a delicious way of throwing back her head and half

closing her laughing eyes when anyone kissed her) asked what she wanted most of all things in the world. The young lady was going horseback to town, and supposed of course Aimée would say she wanted candy, or fruit, or a toy ; but no, the little thing looked around her and then standing straight up in Ethel's arms, holding on to the top of that person's hair, replied in her baby voice, "Des un of my ittle chickens bo-yu-ld!" (boiled.) And the sister, laughing heartily, carried her away to the house.

The rector of the church at which the St. Clairs attended was a good old man, but he had the face of a Mirabeau, and they could not get the child to be friendly with him, or to allow him to touch her. Several years after, when it was discovered she had a rarely beautiful voice, she would sing anywhere save in his church. And so she grew, inexplicable to herself and those who knew her best—to others sweet, and merry, and pretty.

This graduation at hand did not worry her in the least. That was what she had gone to school for, and she never thought what was to happen next. It was well she did not know.

Mrs. St. Clair herself dressed Aimée for her Commencement in white satin and lace, and turned pale as the young girl said, laughing,

"Now, mamma, I look ready for my coffin; has the casket come?"

"Don't talk so, Aimée," she said chidingly. "Give me your essay, dear, and I'll tie these ribbons on it." Aimée produced it, and they both laughed. It was soiled and grass-stained, and part of it was written on an embroidered handkerchief!

"Aimée, Aimée, how is this?" Mrs. St. Clair was finally able to ask, in a tone of discouragement.

"Why, Mamma, dear, you know it is here," and she touched her white brow lightly. "I said it to the Professor yesterday. Don't you trouble, Mamma, dear. I know I should have copied it, but I did want to finish my book."

And the announcement of the maid that the carriage was ready, was all that saved the lady from a graphic recitation from "Les Miserables," the book that had so interested the girl.

The fanciful creation about her classmates, so entirely her own, that Aimée recited from the stage of the music-hall that night, was published and became quite the town talk for a few days; and meanwhile, what of Aimée?

With flowers—flowers everywhere, she went to sleep that night—the last careless night of her childhood. It was quite fitting that her thoughtful maid should have festooned them all

around the brass bed, and hung groups of Jacques and La France roses with folds of its draperies—it was the bier of a careless youth. But she who slept there was ignorant as yet—so let it be gay and festive.

When she woke the next morning, she was reluctant to rise. The air was deliciously heavy with the expiring breath of the roses. As she lay, a beautiful picture of health and happiness, the sound of something falling in an unused room across the big hall, startled her to an upright position. What could it be? No one ever went in there. There was nothing in the room except its deeply padded Gobelin blue carpet and the ugly, ungainly tapestries of its walls. These could not have made the noise. Suddenly she remembered an old rosewood chest of drawers; more than a hundred years old, one of the white-headed servants had told her. It was the only piece of furniture in that room. It had been there when the estate was purchased, and they were afraid it would break or fall in pieces if moved. So they packed a lot of things in it for Mrs. St. Clair, and locked the drawers. No one ever went near it. The room was the middle of a large suite, not in use because not needed, as the house was very commodious.

Aimée thought the ceiling must have fallen, or the big window—the chest could not. So she

slipped on a blue crape wrapper, and thrusting her feet into the worn little slippers at the head of the bed, went through her rooms and across the unused hall to the *dark chamber*. "Ough!" she said aloud as the felt-covered door fell to behind her, and the gloomy figures glowered at her from the tapestries. Dust was thick everywhere. They always spoke of it as the dark room, because it was right in the middle of a suite, yet communicated with neither of the adjoining rooms, the openings having been closed up for some reason, and it had only one window; enormous enough to give light sufficient, but darkened by the massive, queerly-built mouldings. Aimée saw the window was as usual, but in the very darkest corner of the room was a heap of ruins. The rosewood chest of drawers had collapsed. She had always disliked the ungainly thing and was glad it had gone to pieces, and she trilled as if in amazed exultation, "tra, la, la, la, la, la," but stopped abruptly as the echoes began to return in demoniacal "ha, ha, ha, ha's," and she felt an uncomfortable tension of the skin as if boding ill, had she only known it.

"What a mess it made," she said aloud to keep herself company by her voice, and walking toward the ruins as her eyes became accustomed to the gloom. "Wonder what is in the

bundles—three bundles," and she sat down on the fattest filled with yellow linens marked with a big "M" monogram and took one of the others in her lap. "Boo! all over camphor," she said, and as she thought of her peculiar sensation and fright a few moments before at the sound of her echo, she repeated bravely, "Boo, Boo, Boo! I say," and not waiting for the echo, "Now, see what is in this. These, Mr. Echo," she continued, "are my Portia's caskets. I think this one has her picture in it; it says"—and she made a pretense of reading the white linen sheet as she unpinned it with her teeth. "It says," she went on in a jocular tone, 'Who chooseth me getteth what many men desire,'" and out the contents fell on the floor.

Rare old laces and hand-made doilies elaborately done, and yellow with age, and one exquisite altar cloth, embroidered in gold almost to a mass. "Well done, ye people of the past," she said; "I couldn't do it, do it, do it," she sang, as was her habit when alone, to a little tune as she rolled them up and again pinned the bundle. The pins went in hard. "Now for the next, now for the next, next, next, next,"—this she sang rapidly to the tune of "Lead, Kindly Light, Amid the Encircling Gloom." "This one says, 'Who chooses me gets what he does deserve.'" This bundle was tied with pale blue ribbons;

they were faded ribbons. Aimée untied them, and again felt that cold roughness break out upon her flesh. The contents did not roll on the floor this time, but fell softly over her lap, and she saw they were baby clothes, such "dear little teeny, weeny baby clothes," she said aloud, and she thought they must have belonged to her sister, Edith St. Clair, who, so Rachael told her, had died while yet a baby, and she raised the delicate, misty, fine, silk slip to her face. But why was her own name exquisitely embroidered on its hem? She spelled it aloud, and became excited. An entire baby outfit was there, all marked with her name, not Edith at all, but *Aimée*, her name. What did it mean? Even the inside of the fleecy cloak had "Aimée" woven curiously in its lining. She must be dreaming. And she went over them all again. Why should her baby garments be saved and not those of the other children? She was not the baby, nor the firstborn. Besides, they were so quaintly fashioned. Not at all like any other baby clothes she had seen. In one tiny stocking was a piece of paper. She seized it eagerly as if possessed by a demon of curiosity. Perhaps that would explain it all. It was a letter written in Spanish, and Aimée trembled as she read, while the color fled from her face, leaving it whiter than the time-worn garments. These were its contents:

"Take care of my baby, to the person who finds this basket and my treasure. Protect my baby. *She will some day repay you well.* There is money—abundant money—for her childhood, in the bottom of the basket. Be good and tender with her, and guard her impulses. Her mother dies unhappy, imploring God's mercy on her Aimée, and leaving her to unmerciful man. Forgive me, I could not kill her!" There was no signature.

As in a dream she laid the garments all in their places, keeping out only the filmy slip and the letter. Then she could not fasten it—could not find the pins—forgetting it had been tied with the faded ribbons, and she unconsciously took one of the sharp gold daggers with a turquoise head from the throat of her robe and so securing the contents laid it tenderly with the other two bundles just as she had found them, and then hurried across the hall and into her bed, where she wet with tears the little baby dress pressed to her throbbing breast; and so her maid found her. Tears are not noble. That was the last time Aimée cried for almost six years.

With her head on the black mammy's shoulder she sobbed out the whole story of her discovery. She was not a St. Clair at all. *She had no name.* And even at this point her grief alarmed the

faithful, tender-hearted maid, who could not see why such a thing should affect any person. "Never yo' mind, dear, I'll take care o' you," she said, but it was noon when Aimée finally consented to have her breakfast brought, and then she fell into a dry, sobbing slumber, and only Rachael caught the murmured "no name" so pathetically repeated again and again.

## CHAPTER III.

### GOOD-BYE.

"Farewell! a word that must be, and hath been—
A sound which makes us linger;—yet—farewell."
—BYRON.

It was evening when Aimée awoke and inquired if she had slept long, and whether any one had asked about her. Although the day after her graduation, none of the family had missed her. The St. Clairs were a large family, and just at this time their neglect hurt her. She saw it all—how it was they never really cared for her. "Of course, mammy, it's all right," she whispered in a dry voice, "only it was so sudden; I was so happy," and that sympathetic creature would reply, "No, no, honey, don't yo' spoil yo' pretty eyes! No, no! You'll be happy 'gin too, som' da', min' what ol' Rachael say."

"But where will we go, what will we do?" And as the girl said this her smooth forehead was puckered into a thoughtful frown.

This Aimée, little more than a child, had never for an instant considered staying longer at the

only home she had ever known. The letter told her finely discerning nature in plainest terms that she would be, from this time, simply a pauper. The St. Clair responsibility ended with her childhood, and every independent drop of her aristocratic blood asserted its power. She must be independent. They had been good to her—very good—had never denied her anything, and had discriminated in her favor sometimes against the other children; but what a mockery it had been—merely from a sense of duty to her dead mother! Oh, why had her mother died, and who had she been? What was her name? What was her own name? The agony of this last thought almost killed her. No pedigree. A nameless nobody—she who had always treasured birth and rearing and who had always been so content in the knowledge that she was of the best people, the first families in the State, accepting it as a matter of course. But the beautiful old mansion, with its broad, velvety lawns, had lost all its attractions for her now. Not that it had suddenly become less beautiful, or that she loved it less, but these things were overpowered by her pride. Even the clear voice of the babbling brook down under the fragrant magnolias was drowned by the clamorings within her. A nameless orphan living with the St. Clairs! What if people knew? The village would know

it some day, she felt sure. Such things are like murder, they will leak out, she thought, and smiled nervously.

Her mind was in a fearful uproar. Schoolmates and classmates had nick-named her haughty because of the poise of her head, and she had laughed and resented it, but the fitness made it cling to her. And now—she thought bitterly—even if they never knew, she could not be the same among them, with the horrible truth haunting her. Finally she fell to reviewing before her the persons of humble origin who have risen above it, and to the greatness of fame and fortune.

And she thought of Shakespeare, the son of a wool merchant; of delightful Jules Verne, child of a day laborer; of Dickens—her beloved Dickens, whose father was a poverty-stricken clerk in the navy pay office; of Napoleon's humble youth, and that of Columbus and Daniel Webster. They all mingled together and rushed to her mind pell-mell.

Yet the brilliant array could not calm the heart of this young girl, by nature so proud, who awoke one morning in her fifteenth year to find herself deprived of the good name she had always borne, and left a homeless orphan, with only one exquisite little dress with a finely

wrought "Aimée" in its broad hem. That was her nameless heritage.

The next day, as if to repair the neglect, the entire family were devoted to her, all thinking the late excitement of school closing had been too great for her strength. Yet with all this kindness, she never once wavered in her purpose of leaving them. They little dreamed, as she graciously and more meekly than usual accepted their kindness and attentions, how deep-seated her trouble really was. They only knew she was not well.

Aimée realized at this time how much the St. Clairs had been to her. She *did* love them. She loved the boys, and her "Mamma," the only one she had ever known. How tenderly the stately lady had dressed her for the Commencement—that eventful evening. Kissed her, too, and said she was proud of her. All these things she remembered.

But when she came to bid good-bye to the big, lonesome library, in whose deep windows she had read away the short winter days for years, and when she caressed, for what she well knew to be the last time, the silky mane of her own beautiful horse, and felt his cold nose on her cheek, and when she stroked Don's massive head as he stayed devotedly at her side, she struggled. The horse and the dog loved Aimée truly in

their manner, and love is even more powerful than pride, sometimes. But only for an instant in this case. It was very vague, the future was, to this childish mind, just at that time, for her nature was so shocked. She had heard, however, of a college where girls were taught music for their services—that was where she would go; she and Rachael. The letter had said she would repay her benefactors *well*. Perhaps some day she should; she meant to; only her name, what about that? What name would she have after she had gone away—at the school?

She was lying on a Turkish couch, ostensibly reading, when she thought of this contingency. Rachael was sewing by her side. All at once she dropped the book, and said,

"Mammy, what is your name?"

"Lor', Miss Aimée, you most scar' me, chile! My name?" that person replied.

"Yes, your whole name."

"Reckon my name St. Clair now. Been on this estate ni' ten years," and she went on sewing.

"But before that, Mammy, dear," and Aimée playfully took the needle from her hands and made a pretense of sewing the draperies which hung from the windows near her.

"Rachael Katura Rebecca Arno," she said,

briefly, and Aimée laughingly returned the needle.

"That's a pretty name, Rachael. Mammy, I'm going to have it for my name, too. Aimée Arno. How do you like it?" and she jumped up impulsively, and, grasping one big black hand in her own fair ones, made the stiff darkey follow her in mad gyrations round the room, singing the new name to a waltz tune. Then she paused breathless as the maid sank into a chair, and said, "Well, Katura Rebecca, sit there, and be the orchestra circle, while I do this butterfly for you," and she made a dive into the wardrobe, bringing forth a voluminous dotted Swiss skirt, and various others of all the different colors she could find. When she had put them on she announced:

"'Aimée Arno.' I don't see, Mammy, why you slighted the rest of Jacob's wives. You should call yourself, Sarah Katura Rebecca Rachael Leah. Now, Rachael Katura, you must be excited upon hearing my name announced. Must go—ahem! and fidget around, and stretch your neck to see her come on the stage. That's right."

And then she danced beautifully and untiringly for an hour or more, only pausing to change her fantastic costumes. Then she threw herself

again on the couch and lay still for a few minutes, telling the immovable-featured maid about her plans. They would go the next day. She had money for two tickets and a little more. They would not take anything save necessaries, and the little dress.

"Mammy, dear," she said, her eyes brightening, "Aimée Arno will be somebody, do you hear? Aimée Arno will make the world hear her. She will be an honor to the family that honored her with protection."

Rachael was never surprised at anything her impetuous charge did, but she was alarmed at her flushed face and her intense impetuosity.

"Don't, chile, don't get 'cited. Let me bathe you' face. If you go to-morrow you must sleep to-night and be quiet. There's a pretty dear!"

The next afternoon Aimée St. Clair went to the post-office, taking the black woman with her, and was never seen again.

The day before, the family had left for their country home in the mountains, Aimée only refusing to go. Mrs. St. Clair said she was not very well, and perhaps they had better leave her a few days at the estate, and then have Rachael bring her to join them. But she never did.

At the big iron gate, with its strange stone

posts, the girl paused to take a last loving look at the beautiful place. She wore the same dark velvet dress with its fresh cuffs and broad collar, and on the shining curls was the jaunty Tam O' Shanter. In the same school-bag held listlessly in her hand, was her tiny prayer-book with its jeweled markers with the long baby dress wrapped around it; and on her white hand was a curious ring. The servant carried an ordinary satchel.

As she drew a long breath, like children sometimes do when contemplating mischief, or in the act, she felt a strange homesickness, but did not know it. She did not realize what it was made her feel so choked up.

"Good-bye," she said; "good-bye, hammocks, and orange-trees, and soft-thorned acacias. Good-bye. Some day, maybe, Aimée will come back to you a great woman."

And she ran back up the path to meet the dog Don, and gave him the bag while she drew the silk gloves over the odd ring. They walked to the depot, and the reproachful eyes of this big animal were the last parting memory of her childhood home.

"Good-bye, Don," she called from the train window, and the intelligent fellow stood looking toward her until he could no longer discern even

the trimmings of the dress of his playmate. Aimée wanted to cry, but she did not. And one by one the well-known landmarks faded out of sight, and the home of her childhood sank behind her in the long evening shadows.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SONG-BIRD OF THE SEMINARY.

"Soft is the music that would charm forever;
The flower of sweetest smell is shy and lowly."
—WORDSWORTH.

The history of her student life we will not delineate. The St. Clairs could find no trace of her, and in their easy manner dropped the subject, concluding she had in some way ended her life. They made diligent search for the lost girl, but no tidings could be gained of her whereabouts. The landed estates of the South are far apart, and the buzzing notoriety of thickly populated communities does not prevail; and though the disappearance of Aimée occasioned some commotion for a season, it was generally said that she had run away, and rumor went no further. Thus the languor of society obscures recollections.

They had done right by the girl, at least. But the children wept bitterly and the big St. Bernard wandered around and would not eat for two days. Then things went on as usual.

Aimée St. Clair was indeed dead, but hundreds of miles away Aimée Arno was just beginning life.

The matron of the college found her new student orphan had two talents—music and a wonderful memory. She helped her. That is, she gave her that tender, intelligent love which she so needed. The faithful Rachael was duly installed as chambermaid, and was allowed to devote all her spare moments to her charge. At eighteen Aimée had taught her way through by giving Spanish and vocal lessons, had graduated, and to her surprise found eight hundred dollars to her credit.

From the first day of her entrance into the college, music was her passion, her life. She seemed to gather all harmonies as the flowers gather the dawn and the dew.

Her teacher found her proficient not only in her lessons and the technique of instruction, but also in the compositions of the masters. Soon she was heard varying their themes, and giving new treatment to the finest music of her repertoire. From this she went forward rapidly to original compositions, and it was soon seen that her genius was going to bear her on to triumph. From this stage of her progress she was permitted to take her own course. *Her ambition took the form of an opera.*

At first she entered heart and soul into the amateur renderings that were given at the college. In these she was easily the star, sometimes producing the operettas that were given on such occasions. These were often very meritorious, and the instructors sat with wide-eyed wonder at the recitals of their brilliant pupil. So her development ran on as unique as it was rapid; yet she had never exerted all her capabilities in this line.

The time now arrived when she was to try her wings in the mountain air of great flight. The ambition came to write a great opera. She began it secretly and hid it in her room as an unnameable treasure, known to no one. It was her dearest ambition to finish this. It seemed that in her new existence her entire life had been turned to music. Thus is adversity often the means of developing genius. It was her new life, and the desire to succeed was the fire that kindled her daily endeavor. She came to be spoken of as a genius, a prodigy. She was merry and a prime favorite in the big school for girls; but she loved best her room, her black mammy, and to be alone with her piano, a present from the faculty, who appreciated genius. All that was necessary, all she desired, needed, was time and solitude. She had it all arranged, but it would require a peaceful, quiet existence in order

to make it a success, and the concentration of all her energies. No one knew of her ambition, not even Rachael. She never told anything unless she was sure of it. For she argued to herself this way, If I fail (and she always whispered that word) only one person suffers—a modified disappointment. If my friends, too, had hoped with me, they would suffer, and my own disappointment would *be acute.*

And so it was she resolved, one moonlight night as she tossed her head restlessly to and fro on the pillows, unable to sleep for thinking and planning, to go far north to Washington and ask the President of the United States for a government position with short hours. That would give her opportunity; and opportunity was her dream. But fortune saved her from having to adopt such a course. This is how it occurred. The matron's uncle was a United States Senator. They were great friends, as is often the case among Southerners related. It so happened that the very day Aimée told the lady her desire to go into government life at the capital, that gentleman visited the school and remained several days, advising her in regard to new methods and changes. They were high-minded people of first rank, unselfish, and Christians. Even while Aimée was talking, an excited light in her earnest eyes, the Senator entered the room

quietly, and, although she did not know it for weeks after, heard all she said. Her earnest manner pleased him, as it did most folks. Later in the day she was called before the sweet matron and presented to Senator Dryden, and they together arranged Aimée's future. Mr. Dryden would get her a position, a comfortable one, and futhermore, he owned an old and odd but comfortable home there, and as he was to sail in a few days for Europe to be gone all winter—for a year, in fact—he would be glad to have her take Rachael and occupy it.

"That would give you solitude," he said. "But why does a young girl like you want solitude? Mary," he continued, nodding toward the matron, "tells me you are a musical genius. Is that the reason?" and a twinkle came into his eye.

There was something about the young girl that won all to her and inspired trust. Then he talked more freely about her affairs, as he saw she was only young and had never been alone in a city, but did not urge her to reveal the secret to him. Perhaps that was why this strangely perverse Aimée told him the whole thing, under a solemn promise. Told him she was an orphan, and was writing an opera, and he greatly encouraged her. This happened in the pretty music room of his home the first day she spent

there, and the day before she was to go to the "office" and he to sail.

The kindly matron had stayed with her for a week, and then she and the black guardian of her childhood were practically left alone for a year.

At the end of that time their life was much as it had been at the beginning. Aimée went daily to her duties and spent her evenings and all her spare time in composing the opera. It was almost completed when the Senator and his wife returned. The girl was pale and her figure less rounded than usual by this long confinement, and when they insisted upon taking her with them to various receptions, and to the play, she consented. Mr. Dryden and his wife, having no family, took a strong liking to the merry, happy orphan, and would not hear to her leaving them. Mrs. Dryden, who was a strict Episcopalian, particularly approved of Aimée Arno, partly because she had lived in Washington a year and had never permitted anyone to call on her, and partly, as she told her husband, being a sweet, frank woman, because she enjoyed seeing her pour the tea and assist her on her "at home" days.

"You know, dear," she would say, "she somehow has such an aristocratic way and looks so pretty and graceful in her picturesque gowns."

There were many appreciable results of her ministry had you been clever enough to recognize them all through the big house. "Seemed more homey for Aimée Arno," they were wont to tell each other; and besides, there was really no ill nature in the child. Sometimes she was amusing and would keep them laughing for hours, while her phases of character were so various that one of Mr. Dryden's Congressional friends said he could be perpetually entertained by her society.

The opera was almost completed, and Aimée Arno appeared much with the Drydens, especially in Senatorial circles. She was received well and unquestioningly, and came to be sought after, both because of her talents and her personality. And all these things strengthened the love which bound her to this family who had been so much to her. When at home—for she called it her home now—she enjoyed up to the last second every minute of the glad day. She was a gay, charming, handsome girl, whose heart held not one grain of malice toward any soul on earth, and her nineteenth birthday was the happiest she had ever known.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE INTRODUCTION.

"Her air, her manners, all who saw admired;
Courteous though coy, and gentle though retired;
The joy of youth and health her eyes display'd
And ease of heart her every look conveyed."

—CRABBE.

"Lady-like, white as snow,
She hardly knew
She was a woman, so
Sweetly she grew."

—OSCAR WILDE.

It was an evening garden party away out Connecticut Avenue, in Washington. More than one young fellow can yet recall, lingering in his memory, a vision of Aimée Arno as she looked that night, in her simple white gown and big gray hat, and see again the small feet in their Frenchy white shoes tripping lightly over the lawn, smooth and thick like a deep ply carpet.

There were chairs out on the grass brought from every available portion of the house to accommodate the guests, and here sat the men

who make laws and do the legislating for the country, surrounded by friendly groups, talking merrily. It was a purely Congressional affair, very gay, and everybody was at ease. The man who had been photographed all over the country a few days before, laughed with the wife of his colleague at the way one magazine had mangled his mouth, and made him look like an anarchist.

Another Congressman, with a well-known sobriquet, was relating his first experience at speech-making, at the same time illustrating his awkward positions and gestures, to the boisterous delight of his hearers, as he had long been regarded as one of the finest orators in the House.

Aimée knew most of the people present and enjoyed the evening splendidly until about ten o'clock. Then, though she could not have said why, she asked her young escort, the son of an Eastern Senator, to take her to Mrs. Dryden. He did, protesting vigorously, as his crowd wanted her to sing a late song newly popular. But she was not in a mood to sing. They found Mrs. Dryden busily engaged in conversation with a number of people she knew, and another, a handsome man with a striking face. English and aristocratic, Aimée thought, at first glance, as the youth reluctantly bid her good-evening. Mrs. Dryden took the girl's ungloved hand, with

its curious ring, in her own lovingly and tenderly, saying:

"I'm glad you have come to me, my dear. Mr. Romera, Aimée Arno." And the deed was donė.

Then the good old lady was called away to settle some laughing dispute in which her husband had become implicated, and the two sat down to await her return.

The smooth face and well-groomed appearance of this man, with every detail of whose public career she had long been familiar, pleased Aimée. As he arranged her chair she could not but contrast him with the snob from whom she had just freed herself, and she was glad, as she had to stay until their carriage was called, of the change.

She had grown into womanhood. I need not tell you she had lovers. All young girls have lovers. But none won her heart. At twenty it had never known a throb of love, although Mr. Dryden had had two proposals for her hand from men of rank. Then she met him. She had recognized the name as soon as she heard it, that of a public man; a man of the nation; and she said to him, with her delicate Southern accent: "I presume, Mr. Romera, that you great men, who control and settle great questions of vital importance to so many people, have hosts of

friends, and are very happy and contented." Merely a remark, with a slightly questioning intonation.

"No, they are not what you call true friends. I suppose I could count on my two hands, yes, easily," raising his bright, fascinating eyes quickly to her face for an instant, "all my real friends—those I can depend upon. Of course," he continued, "the others feel sort of grateful," and he smiled at her surprise.

He was sitting in a big, leather chair, with both elbows resting on its padded arms. His hands were held together before him, pyramid like, the dainty finger tips gently caressing each other, and the effect of their exquisite beauty and remarkable symmetry was not unnoticed by the girl. She liked, too, the careless nonchalance and the half-amused smile; but the cold-blooded manner in which he spoke of friendship made the impulsive heart of his listener swell with indignation, and she felt an ardent and not unworthy desire to show this great man of the world that she could be a friend, and with all the passion of that impulse on she said: "*Let me be your friend—always.*" And extended her hand.

Russell Romera was interested, and liked the girl's ardor, and above all the gracious, impulsive

manner. Those five words were the beginning of it all.

Soon, at this very moment, indeed, some mutual acquaintances strolled over to them, and Mrs. Dryden returned.

When the white clad figure of Aimée Arno had vanished, one man—perhaps the one most widely known in the entire assembly—stood looking abstractedly and smilingly into the waters of the fountain. Others were with him, but he was recalling the sensation given him by the tremor of a warm, soft hand in his, as the beautiful young girl had bid him good-night.

The next day when Aimée went to her room she found dainty lilies of the valley. Instantly she knew who had sent them, and in her girlhood lore she knew they delicately symbolized innocence and purity. And she reverenced them, and their giver. A book, too, that beautiful and rarely sweet and pure "Modeste Migorn" of Balzac. And at last a note. Only a line or two trusting she would enjoy the book and requesting her permission to call that evening, and signed, yes, she tremblingly glanced at the signature, and with a vivid blush pressed to her lips the words, "Your true friend."

Why? Again I ask why a young and good and pure girl should and could without any hesitancy whatever be affected by the words of a

*married man?* A man who was before the public politically when she was born? Not that she was in love with the man. Far from it. Nothing was further from her mind. But all day the tremulous fever continued, and was intensified by each thought of his note. She wanted him to come, wanted to thank him, and express her gratitude at his appreciation of the proffered friendship of a young thing like her, alone in the world with only book-people for her favorites. And she sat down and penned a puritanically icy reply, merely saying in the most distant way that he might call. And then she awaited the hour. True, she had no appetite for dinner, and was eager to see him again; she was more than eager to have the ordeal—for that was really what it was regarded in her heart—over with.

She felt he was a great man, and what should she say to him; would he not find her dull? Then she vainly tried to rest a little, but soon rose and spent all the time dressing nicely, and starting at every peal of the door-bell, or carriage wheel on the asphalt avenue. Finally she was ready, all dressed in gray, with the brownish red hair piled in a curly mass on top of her shapely head. She rather approved of her head, and so knew how to dress her hair. Just as she sat down at the piano the bell again pealed, and she almost suffocated at the sound of a low, Eng-

lish voice in the hall, which could never belong to any other than he. Truly did Byron say:

> "The devil hath not in all his quiver's device,
> An arrow for the heart like a sweet voice."

When the servant brought the card she tried to compose herself, but it only increased her agitation. She was angry with herself. Never in her life before had she hesitated or been nervous at meeting people. The result was when she entered the parlor she found her hand trembled violently in his, and her indignation increased as she thought how silly he must think her. His composure soon enveloped her in its mantle, and they spent a very pleasant half hour, talking of books, and it was no ordeal at all, but, on the contrary, she would like to have talked longer with him.

And then he left the city—so the papers said. Now she did a foolish thing. She knew the date of his return, and left some roses to greet and welcome him. She had a perhaps romantic desire to be in some way responsible for the success of a real genius; to aid superiority.

At this period of the development of her ideas, there came a passionate desire to penetrate to the heart of one of those abnormal beings so beyond their fellows; to know and understand the working of the thoughts of genius; and she felt

a romantic ardor to comfort his hidden griefs—in brief, to be the friend and companion of a superior man. But love had not then entered the heart, save that without wings—namely, friendship. She well knew that the noblest adornment of a young girl is the flower of an irreproachably pure life. But she was alone again, the Drydens having left that morning for the South for several months, and it never occurred to her innocent mind that it was unwise to send a note with the flowers, and so it happened when Romera returned to his desk, pale lilies of the valley smiled up to him from their dignified leaves, and as he opened the blue tinted note, which from lying among the flowers delicately emitted their fragrance, he involuntarily compared them and their refreshing simplicity with the warm-hearted girl. Aimée had written briefly and simply:

"My Dear Mr. Romera:—Permit me to offer you my hand—that of a true friend in greeting. The flowers are my ambassadors. I admire you. Aimée Arno."

"*Terrace Hill.*"

"Very quaint," he thought. And as he read it again, he said to himself: "She's a sweet, nice thing." And his face flushed as someone

entered the office at that moment, and he thrust the letter into his pocket.

Romera was not an ordinary man. His life had been so filled with public affairs that he had no time nor inclination for society, especially that of women, beyond his own family. He had a wife a little older than himself, who satisfactorily attended to his household and the rearing of his children—a woman such as you might meet a score of any day; one of those women of phlegmatic, unemotional natures, whom so many men marry before their greatness, and women who afterward because of this greatness make their husbands believe, in their blindness, that home surroundings and felicity have been the cause of it all. What giants such men, by nature great, would become, had they wives equally noble and gifted.

It was the budding genius of this unsophisticated girl which was unconsciously alluring Romera. And who shall blame him? He had never known a true, deep, inspiring love; a love with an unselfish ambition for him, which surpassed his own for himself. And he knew from her frankness, that the writer of the flower-scented missive in his pocket really admired and appreciated him. To be sure, men realized his powers, and wrote him laudatory letters, and women flattered him; yet his nature was

strangely stirred by the direct homage of this unknown girl.

When he was again left alone he thought perhaps she had just done it to be unique and that he had entirely misjudged her. Perhaps she was a little flirt. The last was most disgusting, and he had to banish it entirely as he thought of her culture, her home and accomplishments, his call, and every word of their conversation.

And he believed in her, and took her some violets—sweet, rare, English violets—at the risk of finding her at leisure. She was there, and he could not prevent his hand from trembling as he gave the flowers to her, saying in a deep voice, tremulous also, but full of boyish sincerity:

"They are not much, but I wanted you to have them; excuse me, but I had not time to write and thank you to-night. So I came and brought these in their modest way to help me." He did not remove his overcoat, but just stayed a few moments, telling her about the great house-warming and reception to be given in a few days at his new and beautiful home. And he talked of its surroundings, and the beauties of nature in this valley garden spot and wished she might see them. Looking into her true eyes as he bid her good-bye, he forgave her the letter

because he was now convinced of her artlessness.

How like a boy he felt as he entered the carriage and was driven to his hotel. Somehow the spell of her simplicity was on him. How pretty and gentle she looked in her white wrapper, and how true to her own individuality it had been to come to him that way and not keep him waiting while she dressed. She was a dear, sweet thing, and he said it aloud. How aristocratic she had looked when she threw her head a trifle higher than usual as she nestled one of the bunch of violets in the laces of her bosom, and what a pretty foot peeped out in its Grecian slipper from the graceful folds of the gown as she stood. What did the child mean by being alone in that city? It was alleged to be the wickedest city in the United States. And he felt an ardent, friendly desire to know of her past. Not that he needed it to expatiate to his mind the guilt of her being there, but he really fancied, *knew* she must need a friend; at least, to have one in times like this when the Drydens were away. Why should it not be himself? He loved his wife, he argued, and there could be no danger in receiving the confidence of this friendless girl. Strange that such a charming person should have been so long in his circle and he not have known her, save by name. Who and

what was she? and why had he not cared at that time, and why did he care now? But these questions did not alarm him. Why should they? He had merely decided in his generous, warm heart to be friendly to a stranger, pretty and harmless, who had guilelessly and naturally solicited it in the peculiar drift of their first conversation.

The next day he could not efface her image from his mind, and finally grew so restless that he could feel the pressure of the soft white hand as he clasped it at parting. What a study she was and how well read; he liked to think of her book knowledge as his store-house, when they came to know each other better. She could locate any character in noveldom, she had told him with a shamed expression. And immediately, with her own beautiful Southern inflection, had said: "We mus' read, you know, and time is so abundant; and sometimes I write and write stories of my own children—just make them as I fancy them," and he thought that was such a quaint, sweet idea. Then he tried to draw her on to speaking more of herself, but it was a subject she studiously avoided.

Evening came and he dined in the palatial hotel with a group of men whose company usually pleased him, but this time he found them exceedingly dull, and so left them and their

political discussions, against their urgent request that he stay and join the later "game," and going to his room wrote to the girl, asking her to permit him to call that evening. Then he despatched the messenger and sat down by himself at the piano which graced one corner of his room, and lit a Perfecto. And he mused. Did she play, he wondered; really well, and somehow he hoped she should, not arguing what difference it could make to him. If there was one thing in the world this man—this world's man—loved above his honor and its accessories, it was music. We often find genius so. Overwhelming, soul-stirring melodies relieve and abate the tenseness of their minds when overcharged by burdens of thought. A simple melody ofttimes starts the brain to free and lucid activity. Nothing more pleased him than a fine opera, and he had always made his best speeches after hearing one. This may have been the eccentricity of his genius, or it may have been its simplicity. He had acted naturally in this matter. He wanted to see the young lady, and had written the note.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LOVE.

"In the still sweet hour of the dawn's repose,
The shut bud feels the kiss from above,
And breaks with a flush into the rose;
So friendship bursts into full-grown love."

—RIDPATH.

"And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Makes Heaven drowsy with the harmony."

—SHAKESPEARE.

Romera's short call to mention her greeting to him on his return to the city was over. He was gone, and there Aimée stood in her white gown and violets. She heard the carriage wheels roll rapidly away, and listened until their faintest echo died in the distance. Then she pressed the fragrant flowers to her hot face and ran upstairs.

The next night at about seven o'clock a note arrived from the hotel at which he lived. She experienced a hot, choking sensation, and quickly sought her own room and tremblingly tore open the heavy linen envelope. It said:

"My Dear Miss Arno:—It would please me to call this evening and talk with you a little while, if convenient.

"Your friend,

"Russell Romera."

The now excited girl penned an almost illegible reply that she would be delighted to receive him; and he came. All this was perfectly natural.

Aimée was dressed for a ball to be given by the Aldine Club that evening, and to which she fully intended going, and as heartily dreaded, but she never considered it after the note came. Black Jefferson was called and took the message of sudden illness to her escort. She could not go. And then, at that moment, the bell rang before she had time to change her costume. By the reflection of the pier glass as she entered the drawing-room she saw him, and her heart gave such a bound that she leaned a moment against the balustrade, then entered.

"How beautiful you look," he said, extending his hand.

"I am pleased you like my dress," she replied; "it is the one I wore to the Inaugural Ball, and in which I was to dance to-night. I preferred your company," she stammered with a blush, "but had not time to change." All this frankly

and hurriedly with eyes downcast, and as if to have done a disagreeable task.

He seemed gratified by her acknowledgment, and remonstrated a little at her giving up the party, but she would not hear it. Then he asked her to stand up and take off the white fur-trimmed opera coat, which half concealed the handsome dress, in order that he might see it well.

She looked very pretty, pure and sweet. The gown was of silk, daintily trimmed with pearls and laces, the gift of Mrs. Dryden. The straight folds of sea-green armure which fell from the very low empress bodice accentuated the coloring of her face, and especially reflected a strange gleam in the abundant hair. The plump, girlish arms were bare and dimpled, and he noticed one solitaire gleaming from her fingers, and guarding a most curious band of buckled gold. It was only a little thing, but quick as it flashed he saw it, and took her hand to slip another, taken from his own hand, beside it. And there they shimmered together as if plotting a fate for the two. Then Aimée undid the strange band and hastily buckled it on the small finger of his left hand. Neither spoke for a few moments as they sat, their hands lightly touching. Then Romera said :

" The evening is beautiful ; would you not like

to walk? I will be patient while you change your robe, and be sure to bring a wrap with you, as the air is cool;" his voice showed that he was confident she would go.

It was in early spring; in April. Aimée went to her room, only pausing to speak through the tube for the maid.

A little later, she appeared dressed in a warm, rich, red affair, and a cloak with big white buttons, and leather lapels and cuffs; the maid was fastening it, and seeing that she was all right.

"That's a stunning little suit," he remarked as he met her all ready to start. She thought it was a strange expression, and late that evening, when the old black mammy was combing her curls, to Aimée's surprise she said, with a genuine nigger grin: "Tha' gem'man say yo' stunnin'?" But the girl was thinking then of other words, the most beautiful she had ever heard in her short life, and did not reply. As this was not unusual with her capricious charge, the mammy was quiet.

And as they left the house, this strong handsome man asked her if she would not enjoy a drive with him instead of a walk. He would call his carriage from the hotel near. They went into one of its handsome parlors, where he insisted on her drinking a glass of wine. She at

first refused, but finally sipped just a little, and then left it almost untouched. Then the carriage was announced and they were upon the threshold of a new life—a fact neither then knew.

It is no difference where they drove, nor how. Once he asked her to kiss him. Then he told her if she grew much more fascinating he would jump out of the window; and she smiled, for the window was so little. She was only a soft-hearted, warm-blooded Southern girl, and he was irresistible. And so it happened that when he kissed her abundant hair, and caressed the hand which he held firmly in his own, and finally her forehead, that she begged of him, implored him, not to touch her lips. She had an undefinable fear that she could not endure his lips on her own, so cool and full. But they were together alone in an easy padded carriage and he stole his arms around the supple, slight, quivering form. He might as well not have tried to win her consent to her lips, for she had a childish notion they ought to be sacred to a husband or father. But she was moved, and scarcely conscious. She swayed toward him, then bent from him and made, this last time, an ineffectual attempt to get away. He, rather out of patience, stooped over her and, as she threw back her head in a paroxysm of intensest emotion, his head was so near that her lips

brushed his—the merest touch—light and soft as the down on the throat of a swan. White rose lips, he called them; cool and sweet—fine as fire. That was all. They were home again. As he almost lifted her from the carriage she murmured, "I cannot leave you," and he replied, "You need not." But she did not understand. As he bade her good-night in the dimly-lighted hall, in his boyish, truthful tone he whispered twice and over again so near her throat that it made her tremble, "You are just the dearest thing on earth!" And Aimée, with that great overgrown heart of hers—that strange warm heart—*loved*. These words rang in her ears all her life.

If we have guardian angels, why did not hers take her from this world then? That would have been merciful.

That night, for the first time in her life, she did not sleep well, and soon awoke delirious. The good Rachael bathed her in strong tepid vinegar as she pleaded in her wildness, which calmed the tremor of her frame, and then gave her some anodyne which lulled her into a sound slumber just as the early mass bells were beginning to toll. This roused her again, and she drove the faithful old negress away to the church to pray for her.

When she returned, her charge was sleeping

peacefully, but in a high fever. Late in the day she insisted upon being dressed in a little steel gray and delicate blue Marguerite house-dress, and was reclining idly, and listlessly, and restlessly upon a Turkish couch all pillows, in a parlor all crimson and cosy, when his card was brought to her. She went down the stairs and stood trembling before him, with white, drooping eyelids.

"You must despise me," she said, meekly, but with strong feeling. "I know you despise me. You are disappointed in me for allowing you, a married man, to kiss me."

Romera did not reply immediately, but told her he had brought flowers to remind her of him after he had gone. He held them to her face, and she saw his hand was fluttering like her own heart.

"No, I don't dislike you," he said, in an easy tone. Then, as if moved by some irresistible impulse, characteristic of his nature, he said, in those dulcet, deep tones, directly from the heart: "But I do think you are the sweetest thing on earth."

Aimée changed the subject by reminding him that he had forgotten the solitaire, and handed it to him; but he asked her to wear it a few days, and again adjusted it to her hand. He told her he had come to say good-bye, as he had

to leave in half an hour for the South. He would return Tuesday morning. Would she not be at the hotel, and breakfast with him? It would be all right, he assured her. It was a long time before she promised, and even then she vaguely thought something would prevent. She had never heard of such a thing! And that night, after his train had gone and she was saying her evening prayers at the bedside, she asked God if she was going mad to countenance such a thing for one moment.

"O Jesus!" she cried, in her emotion and fear, "care for me as in childhood. I have no mother and no father but thee. I want to be good; do not let harm befall me." Perhaps the Jew-God and the Priest-God did not hear her prayer, but the Good God did.

She soon fell into a nervous sleep and dreamed Romera's beautiful head was upon her breast, and felt the silken hair upon her tender flesh. One of those vivid dreams that linger long in the memory. Years after she remembered the contrast the jetty locks seemed to make with the white breast.

The three days dragged wearily by, and as the evening of the last fell she knew she could not resist going to meet him. She could not pray. There seemed to be a strange gigantic and all-powerful force at work, and she made the long-

suffering mammy kneel and say for her the prayer of her childhood, which she had always attached to her more mature prayers from a force of habit. That sweet little petition:

> "Now I lay me down to sleep
> I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep.
> If I should die before I wake
> I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take,
> And this I ask, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Then she turned her flushed face toward the bright blaze of the gas, and stared until she saw visions, and goblins, and finally fairies, and nymphs, and cupids, and naiads, and then flowers; and at last, as the maid saw the tired eyes relax, and turned down the light, the beautiful, cool, green meadows of oblivion. Then the homely black creature cuddled down on the soft warm rugs by the bedside. And so they slept.

Had Aimée so disturbed the soul of this man?

## CHAPTER VII.

### RUSSELL ROMERA.

"But who would force the Soul, tilts with a straw
Against a Champion cased in adamant."

—WORDSWORTH.

As the train pulled out of the dépôt Romera tried to read. Five minutes later he thought he would rather smoke. He grew nervous and walked through the train. Several persons bowed to him deferentially, but he was not inclined to talk to any of them. He threw himself into his chair again, giving a rather vicious little shove to the fat, unyielding foot-pillow which had almost twisted his ankle. A trifling speck on the patent leather shoes irritated him, and he beckoned the porter, who evidently knew him, and was watching him narrowly from the big, white sclerotic of his eye. He comprehended at once, and as he removed the offending dust, grew talkative as Pullman porters are sometimes wont to do.

"You know me, I see," Romera remarked with a smile.

"'Deed, boss; you rides he'ar purty of'n.

'Mos' every one know you. 'Pears like some 'ow yo' ca-yunt fo'git yo'. Got you in some paper mos' every day." Here to the darkey's surprise Romera laughed heartily. "It's so," he continued, and drew a morning paper from his vest. "See hyar, there yo' is," and Romera saw that the whole front page of the paper was covered by his likeness.

"Moighty good speech that last one you made, the other day. I read every word of it. We don't want no gold standard in this country," he went on enthusiastically. "Tell yo', boss, it was the best deescourse I ever seen. Most specially this part," and, as he began reciting long extracts, Romera paid him, and went into the next car.

Why would his mind revert to that girl? Who and what was she? What, indeed, was he? He almost doubted his own consciousness.

A man of his standing, with a wife and family entirely devoted to him, thinking of another in this unvanquishable manner. How he tried to banish the rosy face by reading a book, yet how it would come on every page, or peep roguishly over the top, or else her voice sounded in his ears, only he could not understand what she said. He felt half intoxicated. Yet he had not told her he would telegraph, but he would do so, and so free his mind by action.

A few minutes later he wrote on a telegraph blank:

"My Dear Little Friend:—It requires a strong effort on my part to retain my senses in thinking of you, for you combine all that can trouble the head or the heart of a man. And I make the most of the little self-possession left me to ask you to reconsider your decision and write me."

Then he thought that a letter could hardly reach him until he returned, and in utter disgust with himself he tore the yellow sheet into fragments, and the brief message which soon flew over the lines was this:

"Journey stupid, save for thoughts of you. Will be with you speedily. Do not fail to meet me. I love you.

"Russell Romera."

To his amazement, at the next station he received a reply. It was evidently penned impulsively, and referred alone to his last sentence.

"It is the alluringness of obscurity, intensified by absence." And it was not signed.

A man of genius can easily become enamored with a mysterious unknown who combines such fearlessness with such originality, and Romera allowed himself to be preoccupied by thoughts of her until he reached his destination. Yes, it was a foretaste of happiness, and as he left the bright little dépôt he wired her two words: "Meet me, R."

Then he wondered if it was quite loyal in him to enthrone himself in the heart of a person who, with her undeveloped ideas of right, had tried hard to be indifferent to his advances. He saw again the horrified expression of her face the evening they drove together as she begged him not to kiss her. "You are a married man," he heard the dulcet tones say, and then she had thrown her head back with a pained grace as if the memory wounded her, and then her breath had accidentally met his own. What man would not have done just what he did? Take the silky head between his hands and press his lips tightly to hers. He could feel the fine, warm head yet, and its throbbing temples.

He knew well that he was entirely responsible for her loving him, and he felt that she did love him despite the telegram. And he had a little twinge of conscience as he thought of his advances, or her innocently proffered friendship. Perhaps he should not have sent her the flowers

at all. But she was a sweet, guileless creature, and he had no idea of any possibility of his ever falling in love with such a child. He supposed most likely she had sweethearts of her own age by the score, as most girls do.

But when he found her such a strange, solitary being, with views so advanced for her years, and living quietly in a big, solemn house, out of the world, and most of the time with no companion save an old Southern mammy, a creature whose homeliness could scarcely be exaggerated, he became interested. How her eyes had beamed with shy pleasure as she gave him her trembling white hand the first evening he had called. And again, he heard the clear, low, bell-like tones of her first words: "We live in this sometimes painful exclusion to avoid interrogation." And he remembered how her innate refinement impressed him, and in the generous nobility of his nature he felt a desire to—not exactly protect her, but to make her happier by little attentions. It had gratified his vanity somewhat, especially after he had conversed with her, to know that he should have been the only person privileged to call on so estimable a young woman. So intelligent, yet so childlike. What if she *should* love him, and *adore* him with the rare intoxication of girlhood. The German girl had so adored Goethe, and what was the end of

it all? The young ecstatic married a man who was younger and handsomer than Goethe. He was glad to have thought of that instance; it eased his conscience.

Had he known the depths of Aimée's nature, let us do him the justice of saying, he would have written her a letter frankly stating the folly —madness of his love, and then never have sought her again. But he did not; and the maiden, by her solitude, and study, and romantic temperament ready, unconsciously, to love the first *worthy* object which presented itself, made him her friend, her religion, and finally her god, knowing at the same time he was bound to another. She would piously have worshiped his genius until death, and when that came, have retired to some solitude away from man, and so have become immortal through devotion, had not Love usurped the throne of Reason.

So events took their own course, which is the course of Nature and her impulses, and which in this case resulted in the story of a *Life*, a *Love* and a *Hate*.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MEETING.

" Be thou the rainbow to my storms of life !
The evening beam that smiles the clouds away,
And tints to-morrow with prophetic ray !"

—BYRON.

Romera did not exactly like to acknowledge his eagerness to be near the unknown stranger who so filled his mind, but he found himself impatient at any trivial delay of the train which bore him back, as soon as his business was completed. Arriving at the dépôt he gave the cabman a dollar and told him to drive as fast as possible to the hotel. His impatience increased as the distance decreased, and he leaned forward as if to quicken the speed of the horse. Then as he became conscious of the involuntary action he smiled and thought of the little boy who told him one day that he never rode on the "down" side of a railroad car when he traveled, for fear of tipping it over.

"Would she be there?" He repeated the query to himself. What a typical day it was!

Surely she would be there, and what a cosy breakfast they would have. He would serve her and make her talk of herself and her life.

At last. He ran up the broad steps and into the picturesque little dining-room.

Aimée was there dressed all in black, and a big summery hat. She glided gracefully toward him, turning from her contemplation of the portraits which adorned the walls of the room, and raised one gloved hand in a half frightened way, but he rushed toward her and clasped her frantically in his arms, but refrained from kissing her as he saw the alarmed expression. Instead, looking into her face with its rosy color and embarrassed eyes, he raised her proffered hand to his lips reverently, and with a low "pardon," touched the bell for the waiter.

They met frequently during the weeks that followed. To Aimée it was the opening up of a new existence. Soon, from ceasing to discuss them, she overcame her scruples and abandoned herself completely to the happiness of the friendship of a man with a mind entirely removed from the commonplace. It takes a woman who has known the delights of a friendship like this to fully appreciate the character of Aimée Arno. Sometimes they spent long evenings together and he taught her the story of his life, the facts of which were not even dreamed of by the mul-

titudes who hung on his words and read his opinions with such avidity. They little knew that the penetrating judgment of this great man was due to experience, and a familiarity with all phases of life.

Often Romera asked the beautiful girl to be his celestial flower—a panacea for all ills. Again and again he told her that the pure, spontaneous, disinterested homage of her educated and chaste soul was the sweetest treasure of his life. Then the great man would ask Aimée if her fidelity was equal to her beauty, and finally express his inordinate horror of what he called "the worst word in our vocabulary"—"unfaithful," and his contempt for the faithless.

In the character of Romera there was a mixture of the simple and the complex. The man must be interpreted by his race, his age and his country. The English stock has elements gathered from many sources, and these appear and reappear in all typical Britons. What the predominant qualities of the English-speaking race are have been recorded in all the history and folklore of Europe and America. It was Henry Fielding who sang:

> "Oh! The roast beef of Old England,
> And oh! The old English roast beef."

One of the ethnic characteristics of the race is

strength and resoluteness. The Englishman persists more than any other man of modern times. He persists in war. If his war requires one year, well and good; if it requires twenty years, the same. By this method he has built up all of his institutions. He has wrought at his national and personal existence as one might work at an insoluble problem. On the whole, the Englishman is honorable and truthful. He does not willingly lie or deceive. This quality he has from the Anglo-Saxons, who always preferred violence to word-breaking, and blood to treachery. The incoming of the Normans brought complexity of character. It gilded the rudeness of the old national life with the shine of an elegant culture. The Norman quality entered strongly henceforth into English life.

Romera was himself, on his paternal side, of Norman extraction. His romantic qualities were derived from this source. He had in him a remarkable impetuosity based on the solidity of the old English character. There was a mixture of Anglo-Gallic effervescence in his blood with the roar and rush of the old Saxon river. There were times when Romera might appear as a romancer, a provençal knight, a jouster at tournaments, a singer of ballads in castle halls or porticos of palaces. There were other times when he was a Saxon thane, a sailor on foreign seas

under the pennon of St. George, a fighter of bloody sea-fights, a mauler of enemies, a maker of big cannon-balls, a lineal son of Sigurd or Beowulf. All these elements of character combined in the aggregate of his life. His fortieth year found him still an honest man—honest as a boy, but capable of such extraordinary things as should cut across the current rules of conduct. He was devoid of fear, but had a certain residue of British prudence mixed in with his chivalry. It was the latter quality—namely, his disposition to look at things, and to consider before doing—that cost him dearly in the most serious crisis of his life. It was the touch of selfish prudence in him that stood between his hope one day, and the woman that he most adored. It was that that let down the shadow on a loving heart, overturned the altar, and came near breaking the cherubim in pieces.

It was a short time before the period of which we speak that the quality of Romera came out in the restoration of himself to his mother. Her he had never ceased to love. The time came when he would restore himself by bringing her to his American home. He did so by letter, and when it came to the signature, instead of writing Russell Romera, he signed, your affectionate son, Thomas Haddon. Lady Margaret gladly came,

and at length died in the home which his industry, genius and wealth had established.

Russell Romera had been married at the bright beginning of his public career. He was still a young man when that, to him, unfortunate event occurred. Strangely enough, though he had been tossed about like a waif in the purlieus of society, he had never been contaminated, nor had he obtained such experience as might defend him against a fatal mistake in marriage.

As a matter of fact, young men are as often victimized as young women in the question of marriage—the one almost as frequently as the other, go up to the marriage chamber and the new form of life only to be disappointed and cheated out of the inheritance of love. Many a young man rushes blindly over the precipice with the first eligible woman whose hand he happens to touch. In the case of Russell Romera fate lay in wait, with the mesh of disaster.

A woman older than himself, and eager for marriage, discovered him and measured her opportunity. With that feminine instinct which is frequently keenest in half-developed minds, she noted the promise of the young man, and the advantage to herself.

As far as her abilities might lead, she contrived to enmesh him, and succeeded. There was a marriage.

## CHAPTER IX.

### WAS IT LOVE?

"What dire offense from amorous causes springs,
What mighty contests rise from trivial things!"

Did this great man—this man of renown who had risen by effort of his own, and by means of his superior intellect—did he love Aimée?

Soundness of morals is the foundation of all true genius, whatever may be its ultimate end, for genius is natural, and Nature is moral. Romera was an honorable man. A man who covered himself with glory and his *friends with pride*. A man to be moved for the first time in his life with the passion of love as the supreme *motif*. For him, the presence of this spotless, bright young woman brought back youth and spring;—youth with its boyish follies, its virtues, its precipitancies;—spring with its odors, its flowers, its transient showers. He felt an eagerness, a heartiness, a vehemence, the effect of spring. In her little voluptuousness, he found what was sweetest in this freshness of spring. But he had yet to learn, wise as he was, that

Nature is all-powerful, and her spontaneous forces will assert themselves, whether for good or evil. If suppressed, even by the virtue of honor, the hour will come when that very suppression will create a mighty force exploding into a volcano. Romera was very soon to learn this.

His heart throbbed with renewed buoyancy, and he loved her, utterly powerless to resist. True love is always so. In her nature he found those nobler and higher traits which had always been ideal, and existed only in his thoughts. She was young, but solitude had induced wisdom beyond her years. His own nature responded to hers because of the gentle birth of both, although neither of them realized this until long after. At the time of the beginning of their friendship he could not have told you why he was drawn toward her. Nature herself attends to the heart, if she is let alone. He had been a temporarily free man when he met her, and with the simplicity of a man of genius he had followed Nature's guidance. That was why he thought —and rightly—that the happiest moments of his life were with Aimée. Can it be wondered that he sought to have her near him as much as possible? He was better for knowing her—much better; and each time he left her side he felt

equipped anew for life and the affairs of the world.

True, he had a marriage alliance; but it had been seeking rather than sought by him. He could not but contrast his past with *this* love, ennobled as it was by requiring all his powers to keep it at bay. His wife, he recalled with mortification and almost contempt, had surprised him with the tale of her affection. She had been a working woman, and had become a little *passé*. Thrown daily in his society, with the damnable intuition of women, she saw in the handsome young Englishman, some years younger than herself, the germs of great success and fortune. Not that she cared for him; she was too calculating a woman to *love*, but rather for self-aggrandizement and position she had decided to marry him, and she did. He saw it all now under the sublime influence of the clear, refined passion which held him. Sometimes, upon leaving Aimée he thought of his life—the domestic part of it—with feelings so difficult to analyze that he would ask himself if he was the respected statesman and father of two sweet children, or, in reality, a *fiend* disguised like a man.

And why had his heart not been let alone until now? Then he could offer it to this strangely fascinating, friendless creature and be her honorable husband. How proud he would be of such

a wife. She would be so thoughtful of him and his comfort. Once she had brushed his hair—no one had done that since he left his mother, she used to do it, and love to see it shine—and Aimée, too, had caressed it with her fingers, and he would almost have sworn she touched it with her full, rosy lips, just before he told her to stop. God! he could feel the thrills that so moved him yet.

"Love her? I do love her," he would say to himself in the quiet of his room. He knew, too, or rather, strongly suspected, that she loved him without knowing it. And he admired that virgin delicacy with which she kept her deep feelings in the background; he had never known anything like that. Her deep and quiet reserve told as much in effect as did the endless fund of intelligence behind it. In these moments she seemed to him the impersonation of the holiness of womanhood, and her influence breathed upon him deep and divine. Once he dreamed she was his, and awoke with a fixed determination to sever all other ties and take her at any cost. It would not have troubled most men; they would have imposed upon the ignorance of the girl, and her impulsive belief and confidence in the limited humanity within her range of vision. Through her glasses, life was a clear white mirror, healthy and true, and her mind incapable of intrigue or

suspicion. And here it is the sterling value of Romera asserts itself, and we see how variously different dispositions are moved by the same cause. Romera was born a gentleman.

Of her ancestors, whether illustrious, noble or middle-class, he never thought; nor of her history at this time, although he did a little later. In his desperate struggle with himself, and in a vain hope that something in her past might disillusion him, he innately knew she was a lady. What did he care for anything save herself, as she was? He would have been happy forever to live alone with her in that big, odd house where he first talked with her and began to understand her, and see daily her pleasant, proud face. What a pretty expression it always wore. He had once compared her to Marie Stuart, and told her he believed her lips would smile, too, if her head were to be cut off—smile after death. Blue blood never frowned at such a trifle.

And how she played! And the rare melody of her voice would woo anyone into loving her, "if she was that kind of a person," he thought.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE DEFEAT OF PRUDENCE.

"The ruling passion, be it what it will,
The ruling passion conquers reason still."

Romera was human. Unconsciously there was growing within him, noble as he was, that man-like desire for possession; the unquenchable desire to drive her into some fatal inconsistency which would be a virtual declaration of her love; to exercise his power for only a moment, and make her forget herself. He would have denied such a charge most strenuously, but it lived in his heart, ready and eager to assert itself on the slightest provocation.

And it came. One late afternoon in early summer she entered his office and told him she was going away in a few days to stay a long time. "Shall you miss me?" she had asked in her low, rippling voice.

And like a boy he had murmured under his breath: "Of course I will; may I go up to your house right away?"

She nodded and left the room.

He arrived there before she did and was admitted by Rachael. The faithful old mammy, in the dainty boudoir off the drawing-room, was consigning her mistress' wardrobe to the care of a small steamer-trunk, preparing for the journey. Romera, who had been restlessly thrumming the guitar which was lying among the sofa rugs, ever since his entrance, walked over to the draped opening between the two rooms in order to ask the darkey when she was expecting Aimée. He never made the inquiry, but stood watching the old woman as she, ignorant of his presence, held aloft the various soft garments—the underwear of his love. One soft, silk night-dress she held to her black face as if caressing it, because her sweet mistress liked that special one.

Then it was put in place gently with the others, and the dainty lace-betrimmed chemises were shaken out and carefully packed one by one, as she proceeded, all oblivious.

Romera was excited and his heart beating rapidly, when he felt a slight fragrant breath upon his hair, and turned to face Aimée's laughing, questioning eyes.

"I came here to ask when you were expected," he said, hastily. Then as he saw the color flash suddenly into her face as she comprehended the situation, he, too, blushed violently.

A woman or a man—and especially the latter—taken in an act *flagrante delicto*, conceives a deadly hatred of the act itself, and a desire to have revenge on the witness of it. It is not necessarily a malicious desire, but it is one that craves gratification. And so Romera's provocation arrived. And why should he not?—it was only a little thing—why should he not bring her also to his level and to feel the same chagrin, by some unforeseen indiscretion?

It is strange, the alacrity with which such before unheard-of plots form a spirit. In far less time than it has taken to tell it, Romera rejected several and suddenly adopted one. And first he said, just to have something to say:

"I am disheartened and discouraged. Unfit, soul and body, to come before you."

"The latter is immaterial, but what troubles your soul?" Aimée replied.

"I always thought it was the body that was material," he responded with the suspicion of a smile lurking in the deepening corners of his mouth, and they both burst out laughing, glad to relieve their mutual embarrassment.

"Aimée," he continued, placing one hand upon her head and resting his elbow on the piano, "I want you to dine with me this evening, right away," and then, as he followed her glance over her dress, and saw her look anxiously

into the long mirror in front of her: "You look charming in that light Scotch wool, and, *voilá!* See how I tucked away that coquettish curl. What becoming hats you wear. Are you not sweet? Look!" And as they stood before their reflected figures, he stole his strong arm around her. She was trembling. Unused as she was to flattery, it affected her strangely.

Then he repeated, standing in front of her and laying his white hands on the heavy lace yoke which covered her shoulders, and gazing into the fathomless, burning eyes, those words so intoxicating to this young girl: "You *are* the dearest thing on earth!" And there was an unsuppressable fierceness in his voice.

Rachael gave her mistress fresh gloves and kerchief, and tenderly passed a soft chamois over the flushed face until the color was somewhat modified, then gave her the unique love pat, a good-bye movement entirely peculiar to, and original with, the devoted slave, and they were gone.

They arrived at the same hotel at which they had breakfasted on that ever memorable morning when she had met him there, and in which Romera was now living.

Being a man of honor, Romera would not have taken this ignorantly imprudent Aimée to his own apartments, without her consent. But he

did ask her, while standing in the reception-hall, if she would not like to play for him while dinner was preparing. She felt a strong inclination to play away her excitement, and did not attempt to conceal her delight at his proposition, and they walked up the low marble stair. At the door, which was ajar, he told her that it was his private suite, but that the splendid Decker was the best in the place. Incapable as she was of impure thoughts, he might have spared his explanation. With the simplicity of a child, never dreaming she was doing anything imprudent, she walked with him to the piano. She would have done anything Romera said, or approved, such was her confidence in him. She believed him and was at ease in his presence. Her charming *naïveté* almost distracted him.

And as she played his thoughts became tumultuous. Who on earth was she? How little he knew of her past; absolutely nothing. He must. His love, growing stronger and stronger, demanded it. What kind of an unsophisticated, or was it misguided or frivolous being was this luring him out of his senses by her music? And he thought of the German legend of the siren who haunted a rock on the right bank of the Rhine, about half way between Bingen and Coblentz—she who combed her hair with a golden comb and sang a wild song which

enticed fishermen and sailors to destruction on the rocks and rapids at the foot of the precipice. Was Aimée Arno his Lorelei? He would have had less conscience in the matter if she had refused at first. But to go thus guilelessly and unhesitatingly to a man's room! "God, she must trust me!" he thought, half aloud. "I'll never deceive her," and his love enraged him. How she played; he had never heard so exquisite a touch. Now it was "Longing," by Jungmann, a low, maddening, intricate thing; and he rose and paced up and down the big room. When he could stand it no longer he suddenly stopped before her and raised her hands from the keyboard. The action hurt her hands.

"Good heavens!" he said. "You are a witch, and a spirit, and I love you! Who are you? Where did you come from? I must know. Perhaps," he went on vehemently, almost angrily, "you are merely amusing yourself with the follies you are able to make a man twice your age commit." And he thought of the lines:

"But every woman is at heart a rake."

But he stopped abruptly as he saw the expression of pain in her face, for he knew he had no right to wound her so. She was no ordinary person. No more was she capable of doing such a thing as the act which he had mentioned.

At that moment the waiter tapped on the door and spread the cloth for their dinner. Aimée's hands again, at Romera's request, sought the instrument, and a merry little air, one never forgotten by him, tinkled through the sensibilities. Years after he recalled vividly the whole scene and every note of the melody—such was the soul of her playing. Her genius was wonderful. She had improvised the whole thing then and there. Her music was from the heart—its expression, her emotions.

He watched the pretty face for a few moments, almost divine in its reflected inspiration, and then walked to the window, where he stood looking thoughtfully into the street. Let us do him the justice to say he was alarmed at himself, and was struggling against a love which ever more steadily and powerfully asserted itself.

When they were again alone, Aimée rose and glided toward him. Her hat was off, and the brown curls gleamed red in the mellow light, and clung in bewitching disorder round the pink ears and broad, smooth forehead.

"Mr. Romera"—she always gave him his full name—she said softly, and as he felt the subtle, seductive influence of her near presence he turned, and as he looked at her, suddenly, like a great, strong, fierce tiger, caught her

madly, crushingly to him. A tremor shook her frame, and then with a long quivering sigh, she lay passive in his arms.

"You will tell me all about yourself," he said. "I will make you; love like this can have no separate individuality. I have given you my entire confidence. You, young as you are, know my life and affairs far better than any living person. That is how I love you. I did not care to know before I loved you so, when I was just beginning. Even when I thought I loved you as much as possible, when I told you my prospects and business, I did not care to know. Now, I must! You are my life! What a bagatelle, a mere nothing, was that thing I had been supposing was love before I knew you. Oh, Aimée, Aimée, I love you and you are so good and pure, and I a man of honor. Why are you good? Why did I not love someone who would not regard my ties or her spirit—why? because I could not love a woman without a soul!

"Tell me all, Aimée, and frankly—then we will love and wait. Something will happen for us. Forgive me for bringing you here. It was a crime on my part, but I am punished. I wanted you to commit an indiscretion, dear, because I had. I am not good enough for you, —you who are so pure and innocent with your angel white rose lips. I would trust my life to

you. Be my comrade—my most precious thing in life, and let me enter your heart—its innermost recesses."

She raised her facile head and with a face alight and glowing with the inexpressible sublimity of a divine and holy love, allowed her fine eyes to melt into his as she said simply:

"My life is yours."

## CHAPTER XI.

### HIS LETTER.

"All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of Love,
And feel his sacred flame."

—COLERIDGE.

The dinner was perfect. It was natural for Romera to do everything well, and after it was over Aimée lighted a cigar for him and knelt on an elaborate Oriental pillow by his side as he half-reclined in a deeply-cushioned, crimson, easy-chair. Her arm was round his neck, and occasionally, as she talked, her pretty fingers involuntarily caressed his beautiful hair; and thus she told him the story of her birth and her past history, concealing nothing save the "opera," her bosom secret. He kissed her again and again as she grew excited over certain passages of her story and said he loved her better than ever.

"Pray understand, my love," he said. "I am afraid you do not think seriously enough of it. Think of it! It is my life, my soul, a thing

that might inextricably involve me without a moment's warning, and necessitate my sacrificing everthing for you. Don't imagine it is only a trivial affair—but what am I talking? a girl like you could not even understand a *small* love. You darling, dear, independent, lovely, little thing. You are a love!" And his eyes spoke as well as the words—better to Aimée, who loved their wonderful gleams.

Then she told him that *one ambition*, just a trifle, she pretended to him, was still her own secret—hers and Mr. Dryden's, but that she preferred not telling Romera until it had amounted to something. He was at first inclined to be a little displeased that she had confided in the Senator and not in himself, but soon forgot his displeasure and told her she could have all the little mysteries she wanted, and need not tell him until she was ready.

Then they told each other, in that first delightful freedom of acknowledged love, how foolish they had been to struggle against it. Both had tried so hard, in the first place, to banish thoughts of the drive; then they had individually vowed to meet each time no better acquainted than mere social formalities permit. What a farce it had all been. They might have known love would assert itself; and they exchanged confidences in true boy and girl fashion, of how they had thought pri-

vately, and doubtfully, and fearfully, and had at times prayed vaguely, scarcely knowing what to ask, save to be good. Love was good, and they said this many times and abandoned themselves to its power. Yes, they *would* love and wait. It would be only a short time, Romera told her, he was certain. Only a few months, and then he asked her if she would be willing to give up everything for him, and if she would love him enough to compensate his relinquishing all for her? But she did not reply.

The next evening she wrote a long letter to Mrs. Dryden, telling her, she (Aimée) would go on West, where business called Mr. Dryden soon after their Southern trip, and they could join her when they came a few weeks later. She then wrote to the Senator, and told him it was her opera that was taking her before them, and asking him not to allow Mrs. Dryden to wonder or worry about it. She had plenty of money saved from her salary and would stop at the Richelieu, and be there when they arrived, and she hoped to have good tidings to tell him about the secret.

Then this strange girl—so surely did she feel success within her—resigned her position, and spent the following happy day with Romera. Sometimes reading to him, sometimes writing for him, and again playing choice bits of selections from her opera to see their effect upon one

ignorant of what he was hearing. And she was wild with delight when he asked her to play one of them over and over, finally rising from the comfortable cushions and standing near her, humming it softly—he had a charming voice—and trying to make words fit it. Finally he found them, and sitting down at the gilt desk, singing the while, in his characteristic hand, well-nigh illegible to most people, but clear and distinct, even beautiful, to the eyes of the girl, wrote:

TO AIMÉE.

"You're looking as fresh as the morn, darling,
You're looking as bright as the day,
But while on your charm I'm dilating
You're stealing my poor heart away.

"But keep it and welcome,
Its loss I'll not mourn,
Yet one heart's enough for a body,
So pray give me yours in return.

"You're smiling, and that's a good sign, darling,
Say yes, and you'll never repent;
Or if you would rather be silent,
Your silence I'll take for consent.

"That good-natured dimple's a tell-tale,
Now all that I have is your own;
This week you are Kitty Tyrell,
Next week you'll be Mrs. Malone.

"I'll build me a little cot, darling,
I've pigs and potatoes in store;
I've twenty good pounds in the bank,
And maybe a pound or two more.

"It's all very well to have riches,
But I'm such a covetous elf,
I can't help still sighing for something,
*And, darling, that something's yourself.*"

Aimée bent over his shoulder and caressed his hair as he finished, and then they both sang, laughing the while, for it went splendidly. She could scarcely resist her desire to tell all, but she did not. She knew he would be proud of her, but he would be more proud, if he should recognize the tune on the stage—find out for himself. The object of her journey to Chicago was to bring out her opera. Romera never dreamed of the truth, and insisted that she promise never to play that tune for anyone else—"never!" he had said, violently, and she saw he was strangely moved. It was an air she had revised the day after their first ever-memorable drive; it had gone straight from her heart and was now entering his. She evaded the promise by handing him "Kipling's Parliamentary Ditties," and begging him to read "Fuzzy Wuzzy" to her. He read beautifully. His voice had a delightful, bewitchingly pure and natural English accent, and she piled up the dull silk pillows and knelt

in her favorite attitude at his side, turning the pages for him.

"I am sure no one can read Kipling like you," she said when he had finished.

"Read 'Gingo Dim' yet, and then we will lunch and get ready to go to the dépôt," and she touched one of the electric buttons and spoke a few low words to the servant who answered the summons.

But Romera did not read the poem. He rose and clasped the pretty black clad figure in his arms and implored her not to go away Why must she go? he had asked her, and was surprised to hear that it related to the little mystery she had before mentioned to him. He was sure in his heart it was only some childish affair, and this strengthened his protestations against the proposed journey. But the spell of his unconscious approval, evinced by his admiration of the melody and of her faith in her own powers, was upon Aimée and she could not be dissuaded. As they went through the oak-paneled hall to the dining-room—she had luncheon served in the little cosy room off the big, stately dining-room proper—he kissed her, and said, "My own ambitious love, I love even your eccentricities, and I will write you *every single* day," and there was such an original delicious charm in the way he dwelt lingeringly on the words "every single."

"You will write often, dear?" he added, questioningly.

"Yes, Mr. Romera, I'll write whenever I have anything good to tell you," she responded.

Luncheon with Aimée was never stiff nor formal. On this occasion she banished all the help, poured the tea and waited on her lover herself. There were delicious *pâté de fois gras*, sandwiches, and cakes, fruit, and some sparkling wine. It was only poor pretense of eating though, after all. Tears would spring unbidden, and when Romera went over to Aimée's chair, took her pretty face between his hands and kissed her red lips, they gave up the effort and went to one of the broad draped windows, where they stood, his arm around her shoulder and her head thrown back. As Romera looked at her he saw again that imperious hauteur in the curve of her lips which always pleased him —why he could not have said. He called them her "handsome moments." Just then the ponderous, old-fashioned enemy of lovers standing in the corner of the hall chimed merrily as if there were never a parting, and their quick ears heard the wheels of the carriage which was to convey them to the dépôt. Rachael had already gone to see to the baggage, and as Romera enveloped the graceful Aimée in her traveling cloak and buttoned the neat gloves, he felt a fearful

and oppressive lonesomeness stealing over him. What would he do without her, and he drew her to him passionately, pressed burning kisses upon her forehead, eyes and lips, and led her, almost breathless, to the carriage. He did not talk much during the drive, but only rubbed his smooth cheek affectionately against hers, murmuring a low "darling" every now and then.

With an impulse equal to some of Aimée's own, he boarded the train, which, to his dismay, was exactly on time, and—*went with them* some distance.

When Miss Arno and maid registered at the Richelieu, they found a letter awaiting Aimée. It was from Romera, and in the privacy of her room she looked lovingly at the bold, scrawling address, and, girl-like, pressed it to her breast. It was a remarkable love letter, that has never been equaled. It said :

"AIMÉE :—You have entered my life, my soul. Your bright mind, your pure, lovely soul, seems to have become part of me and have taken possession of my heart. The ties that bind us together are so strange that they must ever remain a secret known only to you and to me. Once divulged, and the beautiful spell is broken which seems now to bind two lives in the truest, purest, most spiritual form of love known to

human beings. Little did you think when you inadvertently discovered that tiny baby dress that it would be the talisman which would open to you the door of true, invigorating, ennobling love. Poor dear, it unfolded in one sense a sad story to you, and yet when rightly understood it was so much better that you should know the truth and not live to wonder at the gulf which seemed to separate you from those whom you supposed were your parents. It is far better that it should be as it is. Though separations may bring long hours of sadness and even sorrow, I cannot regret for your sake, my dear Aimée, that we love each other.

"My love for you is so great and so far above ordinary love that it shall never stand in the way of your happiness. I shall always love and admire you so long as you are true to your own nobler instincts and so long as you continue to fight the battle of life with the force and power you have thus far displayed. Indeed, my admiration and respect for you are profound; they are greater than for any other woman. Your career up to this time has been grand. No other woman can show such courage, such ability, such a grasp of things, such a passion for study, for reading, and such indomitable will power. Think of it! You have earned your own living since you were fourteen. You have educated yourself by pay-

ing your way through college. You have mastered all ordinary knowledge. You are accomplished—you are a natural born musician—a genius. And more, you have a brain capable of grasping anything, and—what most all women lack—capacity for work. Capacity—that is the stumbling-block of your sex. A woman with your accomplishments, with your attainments, and with capacity, can do anything. True, she is mistress of the situation; and with this all, my dear Aimée, you have a gentle, loving, refined, true heart; a soul as spotless and pure as a child's; a nature sweet and sympathetic, and, I believe, a love as steadfast as a rock. Believe me, dear one, when I say these are not idle words. I am capable of a great love; I am part of this true, tender love which, as the world goes, is unusual; and it is *I* who see all this in you now, as you are hardly twenty years old. If you make no mistakes, if you only keep on, swaying neither to the right nor to the left, you will indeed some day become one of our greatest women. Literature, poetry, music, are all blended so beautifully in you that I believe you are the completest human being I have ever known or ever imagined. No novelist would dare depict you at twenty. No human being save myself knows or appreciates you for all your qualities. Lovers you have, but they know

you not. Poor fools! they only see the beautiful Aimée, or the brilliant Aimée, or the clever Aimée, or the generous, sympathetic Aimée, or the amiable Aimée, or even the frivolous Aimée (forgive me). They know you not; they have never sounded the depths; they have never been admitted into the recesses of a beautiful soul, a loving heart, a well-stored, splendidly-trained mind. They have never had the sweet pathetic secret of your life laid before them; they know not of your wonderful struggles; they guess not of the hours and hours of monotonous toil; they are unacquainted with your hopes; they have never shared in a small degree your fears; they have neither rejoiced at your success, nor wept with you over your sorrows and trials. To them you are beautiful, strange, perhaps attractive and captivating; but they know you not. Do they? Does anyone save one in this world? I am not speaking now of the beasts of prey. They are too horrible to speak or think of in this connection. They haunt the footsteps of all young women. They are vile; they see or think of nothing but the sensuous side. Draw the curtain; I cannot speak of them.

"Dear, but one knows all the sunshine of your nature; but one knows your life, your thoughts, your hopes, your aspirations, your true nature, your pure soul, your well-trained

mind, your powers of endurance, your capacity for work, your determination and your every emotion, and that one will always cherish the knowledge—until death. It may be in after years some one will appear more capable of understanding you than I am. If so, your happiness alone must be considered. My life has been settled, my career laid out; yours is almost wholly before you. My hope and aim will ever be to see you appreciated, to see you where you belong, with the highest minds of this country, and there you will some day be, I am certain, unless you make some mistake; but you will not. You must see the right even now; you must realize the folly, after surviving the tempestuous Atlantic, of being engulfed in a stagnant pool. *Never!* You are as far removed from danger as any honest American girl. Every drop of blood in your body would rebel, every nerve shudder, at any horrible proposition, should such be forced upon you by bestial creatures incapable of understanding you. A mind like yours is not content with ordinary knowledge, but reaches out oftentimes for information that the ordinary feminine mind dreams not of. Crush them under you like worms. Heed them not; avoid them; they could not understand you in a century. The day will come, when you are older, when these

words will ring in your ears, when you will be silent with their truth. I could write much more. Perhaps I may be misunderstood, but, nevertheless, I must write the truth; you must hear the truth once about yourself. Pray heed this! Not as coming from a lover, but from a true friend—one who understands you, appreciates you, and has ambition for you; who believes you have a mission in this world to fulfill and wants you to fulfill it. A mission worth fulfilling. One who loves you, not because you are a woman, but for your mind, and soul, and heart—for all three; who will always cherish you and always be true to you in the highest sense, and in so doing will not be false to himself. Be of good cheer, my dear Aimée, you will be appreciated. Your ambition will be fulfilled; you will be happy. Keep on in the true way, the noble way, and you will win. A good woman is all the grander, all the nobler, for having passed through the fiery furnace without the smell of fire on her garments. The virtue of being good because you can't be bad is not great. Good-night, and remember you have one soul who *knows you, loves you* and *appreciates you.*

"Your true admirer,

"RUSSELL ROMERA."

And inclosed was this quotation:

"Angel through love, witch through fancy, child by faith, aged by experience, man in brain, woman in heart, strong by hope, poet in thy dreams,—to *thee* belongs this letter, in which thy love, thy fancy, thy sorrow, thy hope, thy dreams are the warp through which is shot a woof less brilliant than is the poesy of thy soul, whose expression, when it shines upon thy countenance, is, to those who love thee, what the characters of a lost language are to scholars."

And so they came. Every day something—perhaps a new picture; perhaps a bundle of newspaper clippings, or some malicious outburst of enemy editor. Once it was a dainty leather panel which folded like a tiny hand purse, but opened to display an exquisitely painted miniature of Romera. All his prospects and projects he discussed freely with her, and as he frequently spoke of his Wall Street affairs, in the love of her heart she began going each morning to the Board of Trade, in order to familiarize herself with the methods and plans of operations, about which she was not, however, wholly ignorant. And so it was she soon became, quietly, quite a successful speculator in wheat. But she rarely wrote to Romera save to tell him she was well and to invite his confidence, but everything she did, every thought which entered her mind was

of him. If she interviewed a playwright at the parlors of the hotel, or dictated to the typewriter the words for the opera, or watched "puts" and "calls," it was all that Romera might appreciate her. She promised herself when she acknowledged her unlawful love that he should be proud of her—more proud than he had ever dreamed. Somehow, she felt the world would be more lenient if she were famous, and she was determined to win him fairly and openly, and if possible with its sanction. Of the wife she never thought, save kindly and pityingly; but the children she grew to love, and often looked at their pictures and recalled Romera's tales of their funny sayings. There were times when she grew desperate to see him, however busy she might have been; and on these occasions she would write him a letter from the depths of her soul.

## CHAPTER XII.

### SUCCESS AND ARDOR.

"All love is sweet,
Given or returned. Common as light is love,
And its familiar voice wearies not ever.

. . . . . .

They who inspire if are most fortunate,
As I am now; but those who feel it most
Are happier still." —SHELLEY.

A month had passed. The Drydens had been to Chicago and returned to Washington, but Aimée begged to stay longer. Mrs. Dryden objected mildly at first, as she needed the girl—now prettier than ever to her fond eyes—to help her receive, and the season would soon commence. Her husband, however, finally induced her to consent to Aimée's remaining in Chicago, and so the matter ended, and Aimée knew down in her heart that she would never see her Washington home again. Her own fine distinctions of honor and conscience would never permit her to be their child as of old, unless they knew of her love, so strangely placed, and that, she knew,

they would never forgive—besides, she *could* not tell them; it would be profanation.

And so she threw life and strength into the opera, and her ambitions all now centered about one object.

Romera was worried. He did not feel happy. His love for this girl was growing, because of her unaccountable silence, or the brevity of her replies to imperative questions. He had written her that he was about to join his family in New York, giving her his new address and beseeching a reply. And so it was at the end of her first month in Chicago, he received the following letter:

"My Dear Mr. Romera:—Yes, I feel that I must write to you once *just as I feel—only this once!* Have you ever, in early June, when the roses were being tossed about so carelessly by the fitful breeze, wondered to yourself how many and which of them would find the *pollard* willow? As a child, among rose-trees, a garden of them, I have. That mysterious, inexplicable wind of *will* drove me to you, just as the tempest I could not understand carried the blossoms to the willow. Can you blame me? It was nature's will, and we were powerless. Tell me you have never for an instant censured my going to you and with you, when your heart whispered to my

waiting one, '*Come.*' I implore you to tell me. Before I met you my soul was torpid; but now —it seems like the morning-glory expanding to the life-giving rays of the sun, and kissed by the delicious morning dews. Do you understand me? You spoke to me through 'Modeste Mignon,' but even she could not love as I do, for she was reared and nurtured by affection from childhood, and perhaps was, on that account, more romantic, than passionately starving for someone to love.

"I think you must know—must *feel*, far better than I can tell you the love you inspire; it involves my life. Vulgar minds have loved and forgotten. Mine for you is eternal, even though we were doomed never to meet again. I can love you secretly, and if honored with your innermost thoughts, those *sources* of greatness of a truly great man, can I not help you? It would be my greatest happiness. Confide in me! And when you are tired and careworn, come to me and let me caress your beautiful hair. We will build the temple of our love higher than the Eiffel, beyond the reach of misfortune. I am young, I know, but do not smile at my ardor, for oh, I have lived so long!

"To you alone in all the world has been revealed my true character. If my tumultuous nature at times appals you (and I cannot see

how, with the beating, throbbing fervor of our strong young blood, our friendship could have been devoid of love), if I have obeyed an impulse I should have repressed, remember that I *know no law but my heart.* It is talking to you now. In my other letters it was Aimée Arno.

"We *know* by heart-throbs, when we are near each other, even though no words are spoken. And sometimes I almost feel that you are an essential part of me. Oh, yours is a soul, a tender, warm, expansive soul that I may allow myself unblushingly to adore. I could never have loved a commonplace nature, nor permitted the caresses of a person of *plebeian instinct*, and no mind capable of soaring higher; but to you my pure soul flew like a bird to its home, rapidly and eagerly, as if certain of a gentle welcome. In its first throes I gave you my whole tempestuous being, intoxicated by the fragrance of the blossoms of passion perhaps, and it is yours forever. Those who live about me cannot feel as I do. There is one delicious, vibrating chord of sweetest music always in my soul, *and yours contains its refrain.*

"My fondness for poetry has not made me sentimental. Why should it? Sentiment is usually supposed to take the place of love. You are my living poem! and nothing—not the

fabled fires nor the Cerberus of Hades—can prevent my adoring you!

"An inner consciousness tells me, at times, that my birth-blood is equal to your own. But, even were it not, even if I never discover my parentage—that very obscurity would indicate that such a child would not be ordinary. If I had been, would I have loved a distinguished man like you?

"Love me. Love me more than you thought you ever could any woman! Some time you may be proud of that love. *You shall never be regretful.* Let us *not* be faint-hearted. I sight halcyon days through the telescope of our mutual powers.

"Let us *not* be patient! we must *make* our lives what we want them, and patience seems to me the virtue of an ox, that meekly treads along beneath its burden, and is *quiet*. I cannot be. My very soul rebels. Our happiness must come soon—its pathway bordered with flowers—*gorgeous roses*, and *pale, sweet lilies*. My soul shall develop and expand in the rays of its sun, and we shall live our lives through, and then go—Whither? *And be one* to the end!

"Let this letter stir the very depths of your heart. *Be true to me as I shall ever be to you, and remember that as I write I am almost mad to see you!* Need I sign myself? AIMÉE."

And he loved her as never before for its ringing sincerity and modesty, strength and hope.

Another month passed. Romera had been to Chicago and spent several delightful days with his love, who was even then rehearsing the opera, which had been accepted for trial on condition that she would herself sing the leading rôle, and not take out the one air which she seemed inclined to omit. But she did not even then tell Romera. He should not be cumbered with her anxiety, she thought, and when he asked her why she would never permit him to call in the evening, why her eyes sparkled so unnaturally whenever he asked her that, she made some evasive reply about needing plenty of rest and said, "Never mind; you will know all some day, Mr. Romera." And the "Mr. Romera" jarred on his senses, filled as was his heart with the memory of her glowing letter. She was relieved when he went East, and he was sad. He had anticipated her being eager to go with him. He knew it would be most unwise; but he loved, and her firm refusal, even while tremblingly clasped to his heart, pained him more than she knew.

So he went to New York alone, and very thoughtful. He wished he did not care so much for Aimée Arno. He still wrote to her

every day; it inspired him to do that, and in a few days after his return wrote her concerning a gigantic speculation he was about to make; and, much to his surprise, she answered him intelligently and valuably. He went into it boldly, and with success. Three days later the following letter arrived, showing so undisguisedly the child-woman, and that something always so inexpressible in her:

"To Russell Romera:—All the words this letter could contain would be inadequate to express my delight at your success. You are wonderful, and I adore the confidence in your own powers which supports you. It so often characterizes genius of the highest order. And could anything be more noble than the way you boldly grappled with such an arduous undertaking? Do not consider my opinion entirely valueless, nor yet think I flatter when I say you are splendidly equipped for the work of contending with the high tides of the commercial world with meritorious rénown and success of the highest and rarest order. You have boundless health and vigor, the buoyant elasticity of youth; *rare mental ability*, and, if you will, the pure love of a woman who *lives* only when with you, and who has implicit confidence in your powers.

You have created within me a feeling that demands you eternally, and will never be satisfied save by *absolute possession of you.* I have ever felt during the eternity since you departed that I am living in torture trying to quell my impetuous desire for love—that sublime form of love to which I was a stranger, except by book-lore, until I met you. This is the situation: I am free; but once gave myself for love; am therefore neither righteous nor bad; among others (friends) I neither love nor repulse; my whole life has been mysterious, and every fibre of my heart tells me I live very much apart from humanity; is it hell, or the border of a terrestrial paradise? It is just which ever it is made, and conscience is an infallible guide so long as we do not kill it. Mine is not yet dead, and I shall never injure others, even though I may be devoid of any high moral aim, as regarded from a Christian standpoint.

"If I might only, in the course of a year, relieve you financially to the amount of what would make you easy, and then steal you away to myself forever! Just be true—true as only such natures as yours can be, and trust in me. I am worthy your love, and I trust, some day, your respect. Have I your confidence? I would not have you think of any woman but me.

"Did you ever think that in every large city, and especially in this one, there exists a layer of people in the crust that forms what is called society, who have no religion, and who have grown dead to their instincts? They have no faith in anything but the prosaics of life. They are so in the majority that they have ceased to feel their own individuality, and have lost track of the beautiful mystery in them, hidden in their very souls. The best of them, not unlike the fabled eel, wriggle around in every light, trying to make you believe that they go in for rainbows and hot water, when all the time your inner sensibilities tell you they are forever black, and love a slimy pool. The men show vulgar haste in expressing admiration, but I loathe them. Not a chord in my nature responds to their brusque and diabolically sudden overtures.

"True, they have admirable traits. Their immense energy, for example, which the marvelous growth of their city attests.

"If I could assimilate with them, perhaps I would be happier, *but I cannot.* I have indeed tried.

"I want you. You have that sort of suppressed fire in your making which suggests a brain so prolific, if I may use that word, of thoughts that the utmost care has to be taken

or exercised to keep them from overcrowding each other, and that is why I love you. You know, don't you? Quick, not scornful of a noble impulse, capable of doing wonderful things, and yet human enough to respond, to one not even (perhaps) of supreme origin. When I start to writing like this I can scarcely stop or write legibly.

"Let me help you always. *I will do anything you ask, for* I am

"Sincerely yours,

"AIMÉE."

The world is against a love like this, especially on the part of Aimée, and yet some strong power, and why not that of a good God, favored it, for its growth was wonderful. Romera was inspired by this letter, so filled with the heart thoughts of the young girl. He well knew that had she been an ordinary person, he would have despised himself for the effect of a few written sentences upon a man in his position. But she was not ordinary. Such a man as he could not have been even interested in one less worthy. And so, urged by a mind that seemed as aggressive as the heart was lovable, he folded the pale, heavy sheets of the ardent missive, and decided to go again to her, if just to look once

more into those deepest blue-black eyes, and see the reflection of the beautiful soul which had dictated the tender rapture. Their hearts were doubtless so akin that Romera had read all the words the girl had sent him in exactly the same spirit in which they were written.

Perhaps the choicest perception which fluttered in Aimée's soul was her worship of all that was noble in Romera. She appreciated his genius, and saw the great possibilities of his life. For him she saw a future. And such a future! Far, far beyond that of the usual mere politician of renown, and she longed to guide him to the inestimable goal. And Romera asked himself again and again, as he thought of all these things, if it were wise to try to resist.

Aimée, after one of those violent outbursts which resulted in the letters, would exist more easily, as if relieved of the suppressed enthusiasm, and she sang much and spent many long hours of toil in order to *make* the success of her production. After she had decided to sing the leading rôle herself, she was determined that the entire opera should be as near flawless as it was possible for her well-nigh indomitable energy and will to make it. To Rose Fialge (the stage name she now assumed), success meant a love and happiness she would never accept with-

out it. Ardently as she loved Romera, she placed her ambition temporarily above that love. It might have been, in the solitary consciousness of her inner soul, in order to palliate that still living, long ago doubt as to the goodness of loving one bound as was her lover—the doubt they had both banished in their first mutual embrace, and which they had called as foolish as their love was irresistible.

But the following brief letter, as if Aimée had divined his very thoughts, which he received only a few moments after his decision to seek her again, made him change his mind, and he waited :

"My Dear Mr. Romera :—Will be in New York soon. Do not come. Need I repeat how I almost suffer for you? That my whole life is yours and yours alone? That my only hope is, that we may some time never be separated? And that I am just as certain that all will turn out my way—our way—as if some power divine had told me so?

"The words you sang to me that day in the music-room were very sweetly sentimental, and I hope I may be able to sing them to you soon again. Very soon.

"After all, is not sentiment the foundation of

emotion, and are they not together the essence of living?

"*I had rather live one moment with you, than be assured of immortality.*

"Most truly,

"AIMÉE."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE "FIRST NIGHT" IN NEW YORK.

"If to her share some female errors fall,
Look in her face and you'll forget them all."

Aimée Arno was known to her manager as Rose Fialge. Of her former history they knew nothing. Managers and *impressarios* do not stop to inquire when the song birds of genius fly their way; they simply take them. They cage them if they can, and are generally well-mannered enough not to torment their winged captives about their origin and previous course of flight. It thus happens that prima donnas escape the tortures of inquiry, and retain alike in the public glare and the private parlor a large measure of individuality and freedom.

The opera was wonderful, and could scarcely be accredited to one so young; so, little was said about its composer, Aimée Arno, and the leading lady, Rose Fialge, was widely advertised. Financially it was a great success, and was soon taken to New York.

During over two months' playing in Chicago, the girl had considered every day the subject of writing all to Romera, but now that she had success, it seemed such a trifling thing. He really had no reason to be proud of her, after all. Many people—the number constantly increasing—had done far more than she. So she wrote him occasionally, as usual, and let events shape themselves. She felt a strange temerity about going to New York. Romera would be sure to find her out there; and perhaps—a horrible thought, which had not before occurred to her—perhaps he did not approve of actresses. And that was the first time Aimée Arno had ever really thought of herself in that rôle, or by that title. The stage had made no difference in her life at all. She still lived quietly with the ugly old mammy, and had made no intimate friends. True, she went nightly before the footlights in a short dress, but it was the very charm of the simplicity of this act, and her easy, clear singing that won her such uproarious fame and spread her name like wildfire over the country.

The day after Romera received the short letter, the company left for the East. Aimée was almost consumed by impatience. She loved him so, and would soon be near him again. All the pent-up forces of her nature were awake, and all

her pleasant memories of his love rushed over her like an avalanche. How had she stayed away so long? And she became so animated and excited that she talked with her manager for an hour or more about the city of New York, where she had never been, and discussed the respective merits of comic opera and comedy in a way that astonished that worthy gentleman.

* * * * *

Eagerly she scanned the audience as she went on the stage upon the opening night amid the tremendous outburst of applause. She looked beautiful. She wore the copper-colored hair in simple waves which gave distinction to the outline of her face, and to her white throat, which quavered deliciously as she sang. The plump, smooth arms and dimpled hands were in becoming relief against the black velvet background of her costume. The small, arched foot in its high heeled patent leathers, and the slender ankle just above, were not lost on the audience. Her dress was short, and when she danced showed the voluminous masses of white lace underskirts. The bodice was laced over filmy, fine, white mull and the lithe, supple waist, giving her an almost childlike appearance.

The boxes were all filled excepting one, but *he* was not there, She was disappointed, for it was a splendid house, and she felt certain the opera

would make a hit. And so it did. The first song she sang received a wonderful *encore*, which could not be refused, although such a thing had never before been permitted in that particular part of the play, and when the curtain fell on the first act all went wild with enthusiasm, and it had to be raised again and again. New Yorkers like anything new and novel, and the unassumed modesty of this refined young songstress pleased them. Most actresses, having been before the public years and years, have become, by the time they are famous, or have a recognized name, rather bold and stagey—youth and innocence was the key to Aimée's marvelous success.

The next scene was moonlight; a warm summer night; and while the favorite was sitting upon some pretty rocks on a smooth lawn, singing to the moon, and her head thrown back in that manner so peculiarly her own, the occupants of the empty box arrived. Romera and his wife, and several others. He could not for an instant exactly see the new singer's face, but the melody—that air, and he passed his hand over his forehead as if to brush away something. It was the same, the very same, Aimée Arno had sung to his own words the last time he saw her before she went West. What memories it brought with it; and he hung his head in thought. They were not his words; but what did it mean? Who

could this wonderful singer, he had been noticing talked of in the papers, be? He looked up, and at that moment, as if by common impulse, she turned her eyes full upon him, and they recognized each other.

Romera was torn by conflicting emotions. At first he almost hated her for bringing a part of their love before the public. How could she, a girl of such innate refinement? And then as in a flash he saw it all. It was her opera, and she did not dare leave the charming aria out. And as the magnetic melody of her voice stole over him as of old, he felt like clasping her to him right then and there, and smiled at her from his box, saying to the lady near him: "She's pretty, and modest, and natural; she will make a great hit among us." And he was grateful that his wife had never known her. That woman, having only a few months before returned from a six months' European tour, was resplendent in a Worth gown, and ablaze with diamonds. In her opinion the actress was "too babyish," but her voice was marvelously clear and her high notes "simply heavenly," she gushed, rudely looking into the various boxes through her lorgnettes.

The last verse, in response to an *encore* in which Aimée had observed Romera to take energetic part, she sang directly to him, fearlessly,

dauntlessly. As the last cadence died gently away, it seemed to soothe his senses like a mournful pæan, and he knew, he felt, from that weird, strange, inexplicable undercurrent of each exquisite tone, that the new star still loved him. How provoking his blindness was to him now. How had he ever thought the ambition of which she spoke childish and naught.

And as the curtain fell, this remark also fell in the Romeras' box, and horrible to at least one of its members: "She's a brazen thing." But Mrs. Romera was a disagreeable woman, and her husband attributed it to malice.

The next day the opera was discussed by hundreds of people, and all pronounced it the most brilliant success of the season. Papers were filled with pictures of the beautiful leading lady. The manager arranged to play indefinitely.

Romera was eager to see her. He would have excused himself from his party and gone back of the scenes at once; but some visitors to his box during one of the intermissions, had told them that it was a fact that this young actress never received anyone there, and was positively averse to making acquaintances. Reporters got their facts elsewhere—usually from the manager; if about costumes—from her maid.

Rose Fialge, her maid, and her manager were at the Plaza Hotel. Romera called early in the

following day, leaving flowers and fruit as of old. And so it chanced when Aimée opened her eyes for the first time in the big city, they fell with glad surprise on the sweetly odorous lilies of the valley. She eagerly asked the thoughtful maid for the note, for she knew there must be one. It gratified her, as she read, to learn that he had taken them to her himself, and was very sorry she had not been awake to receive him. The letter said:

"My Own Darling:—You are a genius! Wonderful! And I love you! Accept the flowers which I have brought hoping to deliver them into your own fair hands. Let me know at once when I may see you alone.

"Your true friend,

"Russell Romera."

She was overjoyed, and immediately despatched a most thrilling and tender reply. Her very heart was laid bare before him in its contents. She told him how it all had been done for him, and then how little it seemed in return for his great and noble love, and then, after mentioning her pleasure at seeing his flowers, she signed herself, "Yours, till death, Aimée Arno."

Of the future she did not think. She only lived a day at a time. If some one had asked her at this time if she intended marrying

Romera, she would perhaps have said Yes; but the question would have surprised her. She only knew that she wanted him near her always. Reared as she had been, marriage seemed a vague form of some sort—not much. Up to this time she had never seen a wedding and had rarely thought of the subject. Of course, it was the usual outcome of love, but of far minor importance. To her, love was the highest form of life. Romera, so did she love him, became her *life*, not in the usual way in which the word is carelessly used; but her very being and all, the moment his lips first met hers, and they loved, as two hearts never can but once in this world.

And so she sent the innocent, love-laden missive, and as she gayly sang her "morning oratorio," as she *called* it, the faithful old Rachael mumbled to herself, "'Pears like Miss Aimée moighty happy," and the strong black hands carried the flowers gently, as if she knew they were the cause of her mistress' joy, and placed them before her on the instrument.

Aimée was thinking not of what she was singing, but she was in fancy watching her lover as he opened and read the tender words intended for no one save himself. How beautiful the day was. She did not know that soon the sunshine of her hopes would be blasted as if the contents

of the ill-fated, harmless blue envelope addressed so plainly to Russell Romera, had been dynamite. And even as she sang, so happy that she trembled with her joy and the expectation of soon seeing him, soon feeling the clasp of his beautiful white hand, even then a dark, ominous cloud—so dark that all the grief of her discovery years ago in the old chest, should be as brightest June in comparison—was hovering, ready to swoop down and eager to destroy her.

She had told him to come to her at five o'clock. As the hour approached she dressed in one of the very gowns she had worn in Washington, the clinging, voluminous white he had admired so much, and which held such pleasant memories for them. And she noted as she looked in her mirror that there was a glad shining light in her eyes, and for perhaps the first time in her short life she realized and was glad she was beautiful.

Then she walked to the window and, with one white arm on the broad shoulders of her mammy, stood idly looking out. She noticed a cloud rising, not very large, way over in the distant sky, and the darkey, following her eyes as she always did her every movement, remarked, "They's go' to be a big storm, chile."

Only a few hours later the mere recalling of those words, which she scarcely heeded at the time, almost killed the young girl.

Romera did not come. A terrific storm broke, and the lightning flashed and the thunder seemed to shake even the massive building. Aimée hid her bright head in the servant's bosom and shivered with terror. A conflict of the elements had always disturbed her, throwing her into convulsions, until she was almost grown.

"Rachael, Rachael, why doesn't he come?" she moaned, and the pain and doubt in her voice was taken up by the low, rumbling tones of the next peal of thunder, and she buried her head and held tighter to the fearless darkey. Then there was a tap at the door of the room adjoining the one in which they were sitting, and Aimée felt a cold sensation that it was not her lover.

Nor was it. But it was what looked like a telegram, and she read, written hastily on telegraph blanks from a hotel near his house:

"My Own Aimée:—Your fatal letter was opened and read by Mrs. Romera. It will be impossible for me to come to-night, but I will be there early to-morrow. She read the letter to me. It was such as you had never written me before. I had rather had her read any other ever penned by your dear hand than this. But do not worry, darling, all will come right. She does not dream you are the actress, but she

thinks you are a bad woman. I told her you are not, and that I love you.

"RUSSELL ROMERA."

The letter, Aimée's very soul, had been opened and read by his wife! Why or how, is not of this story. But it was the beginning of Aimée's first sorrow.

There was a flash of intense lightning rifting the whole heavens zigzag, and instantaneous with it a peal of thunder louder than ever, and the poor child mercifully lost consciousness, and was carried bodily to the lace-draped bed in a smaller room where it was dark. She had not yet recovered when the time came to go to the theatre, and word was sent all over the hotel that she was dangerously ill—unconscious—and the performance would be postponed. She lay perfectly still and white. To look at her you would have thought her dead, so faint was her breathing. At about nine o'clock the big eyes opened inquiringly, and a tremor passed through her body. Then the doctors saw her lips quiver and a crimson spot spring to each cheek. In a few moments she was in a high, delirious fever, rapidly—and inarticulately save to her mammy—asking over and over:

"Am I bad, am I bad? Tell me, there's a good mammy. Didn't I always say my prayers,

and love you? Tell me I am not bad. The woman bad—bad—" and she would ramble on and on, the big, homely, affectionate creature by her side bending over her and soothing her by repeating constantly: "You's a angel, you's a angel—mammy's angel," and never ceasing her crooning, lest she should break out again. The doctors agreed among themselves that it was nothing serious, save excitement combined with terror, and after giving necessary instructions, they departed leaving the girl in an uneasy slumber.

All night long she tossed uneasily, every now and then pleading with, first her manager, then Rachel, sometimes some "woman," to tell her she was not bad. Once she asked if it was wicked to love. And then, as if she had been answered affirmatively, she continued with her eyes still closed, and grasping the yellow slips of paper, which they could not get away, still tighter in her strained hand.

"I did not know it. It was such a beautiful secret. Ours! Mine! And someone else read it first," and then she began raving again until soothed by that peculiar crooning that had been quieting to her ever since her babyhood.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE FATAL LETTER.

"Oh, fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long—
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong."

—LONGFELLOW.

The next morning Aimée awoke very pale, but herself. She tore up the paper she had held so tenaciously in her delirium, and was told as soon as she was bathed and dressed that Mr. Romera was waiting to see her. She was calm now and tearless, her voice alone betraying any emotion by its slight tremulousness. And so she drew aside the portières and glided toward him. Rachael had put a pink be-ribboned under-gown on her. Aimée had not taken any interest in her looks that morning, and over that, to protect her from cold, she had slipped a pale baby-blue robe lined throughout with ermine, leaving it loosely flowing. Her feet were encased in blue slippers bordered with ermine; her hair was free, and she wore no ornaments save a plain,

weighty gold ring. If you might have seen it, there was, too, another piece of jewelry about her. It was a fine, exquisitely wrought chain, carrying a tiny heart of rare workmanship studded with diamonds. This she had worn about her neck ever since Romera had clasped it there, for it contained a priceless treasure—a few strands of his silky black hair.

To Romera she had never appeared so beautiful and *spirituelle.* With an irresistible impulse he took her in his arms and so held her fast, gazing into the lovely, sorrowful eyes, whispering, "My own angel; you are an angel. Poor, little, wounded bird. Have you been very ill? Are you better? Tell me you are well." And they sat down together to talk it all over.

Perhaps no two people ever met who had so much to talk over, and things of such vital importance.

Romera did not speak ill of his wife. He was too honorable for that, and Aimée Arno, young as she was, would have hated him if he had. Whatever that woman had proven herself by the act of opening the letter, she had been his wife for a good many years, and he had lived with her and believed in her. And, moreover, he doubtless would have continued such a life had he never met the younger woman. He told Aimée that Mrs. Romera—he could not say his

*wife* to her—wanted to see her. That she had been furiously angry, but it was over now, and wanted Aimée to talk with her. The look of intense horror in the childish face as he made this proposition almost staggered him. And as she uttered the deep toned "Never!" her eyes were as black as night. That was all she said, and Romera insisted upon her going. That changed the whole thing, and when she saw he was really in earnest she gave a tremulous consent.

The truth of the matter was, she was deathly afraid of a woman who could do such a thing as this woman had. At that moment she knew, quite as well as if she had seen Romera's wife, that they had nothing in common. That she was coarse minded. And somehow the latter thought pained her, for was she not—this woman—Mrs. Romera? No, she could not go before such a woman unless he would go with her, or be there. She wanted him to hear and see all. And she asked him to bear it with her.

"I'll be there," he had said. "She will be kind and gentle, she said so when she told me to ask you to call."

And he really thought she had meant it. Had he known—had the vaguest idea in what inexpressible agony that interview would terminate, he might well have killed Aimée then and there

to spare her, and thereby been merciful. But neither then knew. And finally she again consented to go on the following evening. Romera said he would spend the next day with her, and they would talk, and she would be stronger. They should arrange it between them—she and Mrs. Romera—as to what would be best for the future.

And then they dropped the subject for awhile—at least Romera did, for he was not in the face of such an ordeal as the girl—and they reviewed all their happy past. Romera told how he had been scarcely able to exist without her, and how fearful he had been upon his return from Chicago that she did not and never had loved him—feared she underrated his devotion and love.

"Was there ever anything like it?" he asked, holding her off at arm's length and looking at her with love-saturated eyes, then clasping her to him. Aimée explained how it was the rehearsals had kept her from him when he had gone so far to see her, and how she had been so near telling him her secret several times. She told him how her love for him, and especially those thrilling words, "You are just the dearest thing on earth!" had inspired her, and was surprised at his wonderment when she told him she had resigned before leaving Washington.

"What if you had failed?" he inquired, and she laughed.

"You are a wonderful woman," he continued, "and I love you—love you—and am more than proud of you." And his voice vibrated with sincerity. Then he saw that scared expression again cross her face as she gave him a little jeweled mandolin to tune for her while she dressed for dinner. By the time he had this done she reappeared paler than before in a charming Parisian gown. They dined together, Romera trying to make her cheerful and forgetful of what the morrow meant, and Aimée, in the goodness of her heart, did smile and try so hard to eat the delicacies he prepared so tenderly for her. She was to sing that night, and Romera wrapped her in the long, rich cloak and took her in his own carriage—a thing she did not know until afterward—to the theatre door and left her.

About ten o'clock she saw him enter a box and observe the play intently, as if thinking seriously. He was alone. The floral tributes were numerous that night, but Romera was pleased to see she carried the beautiful valley lilies he had sent, and even fancied their delicate odor greeted him, wafted from the stage.

He tried to see her after the performance, but she had driven rapidly to the hotel. She wanted to sleep. How she tried to sleep!—so that the

night would be over and her lover with her again. And yet she thought—"When it's morning, it's nearer to-morrow evening;" and then her mind would begin working anew and rapidly, trying first to make out what she should say to the woman, and then trying to divert her mind by reciting long poems, or watching a flock of sheep go over a stile. She had heard of the latter when a little girl as sure to send one to sleep. Would she never go to sleep? and she held her eyelids down with her fingers. It was useless. Her blood was afire, her pulse, it seemed to her in her wakefulness, shook the brass bed. Rachael was sleeping; so quietly slipping on a loose, warm robe she sat down to the desk, and—a thing she had never before thought of in her life, but like her oddity—made a will.

When the darkey awoke early next morning, she found the curly head of her mistress drooped over the inky fingers, and knew that she had not slept at all that night.

When Romera came he found her very glad to see him, dressed in a most becoming dark blue street costume, and in a state of the highest nervous tension. Her eyes shone and looked larger than the day before, and her cheeks were delicately flushed. Her manner and movements were quick and excited. She wanted to walk,

she said. She had been taking the maid with her, but, would he not take her? He thought it the very thing for her and suggested the park. But Aimée did not want to be stared at, and insisted upon walking "away down some common crowded street where we will be alone," she said.

And as they walked, she so lightly and gracefully by his side, in her smooth-fitting dark dress, and her face animated, that a strange subtle desire to possess her again came over Romera. He loved her powerfully, and told her so again and over again, until she could endure the burning tones no longer. And he asked her to go away with him; he would necessarily drop his present life, and begin with her anew. Had she consented to this, his name would have gone down to posterity as one of the most famous of men. He had a remarkable intellect and a soul as far above reproach as it was above the souls of the masses, and honor; and she had talents, a consuming love, and a power to *do*. Had they only known and dared to risk all!

But love was all she offered him. And in her pretty voice she rapidly told him the story of "The Judgment of Paris." "After all," she said smiling, "love is everything. Acknowledge me right here, and do not give up your career," she said. And even while he loved her for her

boundless love and confidence, even as he asked her to flee with him away from all the bother of the discovery of their beautiful love secret, he heard the harsh voice of another, a woman—one who had a claim on him, and he felt the hatefulness of his life. What a lie it had been. Why had he not taken this beautiful young soul for his own in defiance of the whole world when he first knew her? He should have known it was the only thing ever to satisfy him. He could not live the rest of his life with the longing for her, and ever make a success of it.

But the harsh voice had told him that another—that Aimée held his character, his honor among his friends, in her hands, and she had made it impossible financially, without involving him in disreputable ruin.

What should the man do? He was almost mad as these thoughts overwhelmed him in their fearful vortex. His honor! His honor! His friends! Then he told Aimée all.

And that proud-spirited young woman told him that love for her should *never dishonor him.* But she was overwrought—the poor girl had not slept, and the strain of the last few days had been almost more than she could bear. She was a fragile thing in suffering. Some of the strongest people are, and she was unused to cruelty; no one had ever been unkind to her.

Then, again, her love for Romera overcame all else, and she said she did not know what should become of her if she lost him. And she told him pathetically—and it almost rent his great, noble heart—how she had given up all her old friends; had never written to the Drydens nor anyone since she felt this love,—so wrong in the eyes of the world, and yet so powerful and beautiful. "Everything I have abandoned to my ambition for you. You are so completely my all, that I feel justified in pleading; it is as if for my life."

But even as she said this, the mind of Romera was distracted by thoughts. What a fearful position he was in, and all brought about by Aimée—true, innocently enough—but he was really suffering mentally and felt like blaming her at that moment. The awful threat to his honor drowned her pleadings and he scarcely heard the appeal, nor saw the eloquent eyes raised to his so distressfully as the crowds swept to and fro around them.

And she hung, despair in her deep eyes only, upon every clear word of the sentence which seemed to her a death-warrant, as he said, "It is out of the question, absolutely." And he soon, as she did not reply, went into an elaborate explanation of the difficulties in which it would involve him—principally financial—and it froze

her heart to hear him weigh the two. Could it be the Romera she loved dealing thus with love as a commodity? And the worse thought that he had by his words of tenderness and bright propositions only a few moments before led her to this valley of humiliation. And she was trembling, and feared he would notice it. Aimée Arno had never been humiliated. Why had he led her to say such things? But she thought much, trying to find herself and to recognize him in his new, sudden light. She was sorry her memory held things so tenaciously just then, for the unkilled love in her heart strove to contradict the present by dragging forth the beautiful past; it was all so recent. It had not been a year yet since she first met him. She could not say anything save that she would have to ride to the hotel, and she would not permit Romera to go with her. As he stood by the carriage, he begged her to smile and be herself; all would come right; if not at once. He told her to be sure not to fail in keeping the evening appointment, and she promised, when he told her again he would be there, and he saw her sink back on to the cushions, and could not but notice how deathly white her face looked against their dark background. That face was trying to tell him of the death of love, killed by pride.

That was the last time he saw her for months,

and no one knew the agony of his mind to recall her as she then looked. If he woke in the night, the silhouette of that profile on the black upholstery was before him in all the distinctness an unquiet conscience makes.

"If I only could find her," he groaned, weeks after, and he fell ill. He recalled her piteous words and the expression of her eyes as she had said: "Give me your counsels; I will obey them all. Mould me to what you will. In your absence I am like a child that fears every shadow in the dark. In your presence my soul expands, and the whole world seems calm in a celestial noonday. Do not deny me that presence. I am *fatherless—ignorant—alone!*"

Would it ever cease ringing in his ears?

But Romera must not be judged too harshly nor hastily. He had done what he regarded—from the cold-blooded standpoint of common sense—the wisest thing he knew. He never thought of Aimée as having done anything immodest or humiliating in that last walk they had together. Never thought of it in that light. He knew he loved her and always would just as much as ever, if he should be separated for a year from her presence. He forgot that youth brooks no delay, and that she was much younger than himself, and that such a thing as he had said to her then would never be forgotten, but in her

unsophisticated way would be applied everywhere.

He was miserable, nevertheless. He could not do anything the day she left him in the carriage, and so took a car for the Plaza, only to find he could not see her. Then he went home and found that his wife would not hear to his being present at the interview. This almost angered him, for it was within a few minutes of the time Aimée would be there, and he could not get a message to her. He sat in the next room, all unstrung, when the bell rang. He knew it was Aimée, and what would she think of him? He had told her he would take her back to the hotel, too! And he rose and walked up and down the room; the sound of voices in the library adjoining roused him. He wished—he did not know why—that his wife would quit talking, and strained his ears to hear Aimée's sweet, low voice; but in vain. Then he threw himself in an almost crazed condition, as all his complications flashed over him, upon the bed and—great man as he was—sobbed for Aimée's sake. And he only raised his head to listen as the carriage wheels moved in front of the house, and to catch their faintest echo as they took his love farther and farther from him.

If Romera had only known how far!

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE INTERVIEW.

"How fading are the joys we dote upon!
Like apparitions seen and gone;
But those which soonest take their flight
Are the most exquisite and strong;
Like angels' visits, short and bright,
Mortality's too weak to bear them long."

—NORRIS.

Why did God make women with such delicate sensibilities? Why did he endow them with those superfine powers of perception and intuition? Why can they not forget? If a woman once suffers, whether by her own sins or those of others, she lives repeated eternities of hell in the recollections from which she cannot shake herself free. And I am here to say that to a child, suddenly become a woman through new awakening to the highest love, there is nothing in life save death, if that love is lost.

You may talk of hearts healing, but I hold that to the true, pure and healthy heart, that tender, trusting exotic, an untrue or impure

love is like the ravages of some loathsome disease which forever scars a dainty complexion. The coarse skin does not show the defect, because the contrast is not so great; but the superior brilliancy of purity is forever impaired.

A young girl, if she is pretty, may still curl her love locks—may even live and live. It is hard for a healthy body to die, and the soul is only slain when hope fails to recruit its forces. But the body may live years, and grow after the heart is stone dead. To live with a dead thing! A dead heart. And so Aimée prayed to die. She was so young, and she might have twenty, thirty, forty years of such torture as memory fed her daily, hourly, every moment. *The humiliation of the day when she implored him*, her eyes brimming, shining with tears, to take her; protect her; keep her near him. Only that she might see him! To give up his wife at any cost! She, too, could make friends for him, and then she loved him so!

"Oh, my darling, my darling, I cannot *live* without you!" she cried, in the depths of her despair. And then even pride was down-trodden for a moment in her wild and vehement affection for him, and she had pleaded with him to let the world know of her sin; they would together be so happy and good that everybody else would reflect their happiness, and none blame them.

"I cannot marry anyone else," she said, in a constrained voice. "I am not bad, only *I love you so!* I hate myself, hate myself for saying these things to you. No," she cried, in a deep, bitter tone, "I hate you for making me say them! Couldn't you foresee this? You who are older than I? Why did you lead me on to this? Why make me love you? My home—friends—even acquaintances—I have given up for you. You were my life, my God, my hope! I have only lived through you, and for such a little while. Must my life end, or can so glorious a love be turned to hatred? Oh, why was I born? Then," and she almost gasped as she said it, "I have never had a mother, and no father. You were my—" then she paused and whispered—"my all. The other woman has her children, and relatives, and friends, and does not, could not, love as I do. Why," she went on, and the tightly clutched hands trembled, as it all came back to her so distinctly, "I would die for you, but I cannot live away from you. Has ever any woman loved you like that?" All this, too, she had said to him on that last walk, and then he had said, "It is entirely out of the question!" and each word twisted like a dagger in her heart, and fastened a bolt; was it of hatred?

Then Romera, as if conscious of the brutality of which he had been guilty, for he had always

been gentle with her, and knew of the wound he was inflicting, had begged her to smile. She tried, she would have tried to swim the Pacific for him, and the mechanical grimace made them both laugh. Then the carriage came. It was a dirty, busy thoroughfare, the last place in the world for such a scene, save for the virtue of oblivion in a throng.

"Now I must go," she remarked, very quietly, for she was lost to feeling, and to save her life could not have analyzed her heart at that moment. She had not entertained the vaguest apprehension of his attitude toward her. Had he not always been good to her—done everything she asked, and only two days before when he wrote her of the fatal, awful catastrophe, said he would do just as she wished? What kind of a man was he, and were they all so? If she had only known that in some masculine hearts other things are of more vital importance than love. She had known illustrious people from childhood, had studied their public life and character; even physiognomy and handwriting, but never had occasion to know their hearts. Women never know men's hearts except through love.

As she rode back home by herself she had not even turned to look after him. She was thinking—rampant, mad thoughts that crimsoned her face and burned her eyes. And she prayed

—she must do something, and she dared not talk to *a living* creature—"Oh, Jesus, of my babyhood, I don't believe you! You are not good. One more thing I shall ask of you. Make me hate him, or I shall hate you. Hate him as I have loved him. Hate him as he has humiliated me. Hate him with so refined a fire that he shall feel my cool lips whenever he should not—my dead heart on his in the night time so heavy that he shall wake all rigid and pale. Make him think of his injustice to me, and my love and trust, when he most tries to be happy. Oh, I cannot, Lord, stoop to revenge, for I have given him my soul, all that was good in me. Take it from him, do not let my purity be contaminated by such a possessor. I don't want it back, Jesus," she said, feverishly; "I was happy in loving, but it was so brief—so short. Why did you let me think his love as great and strong as mine? He told me it was stronger. He swore with his hand on my neck that he never loved like that before; that I had entered his soul; that he was as true as heaven, and was so fearful lest I should not understand how deep his fervor. Is heaven, too, brutally false? Oh, God, if I am wicked in this, I am mad—mad! Did I love?"

The sudden stopping of the carriage roused her. She was pale as death. So pale that the

cabman walked by her up the steps, an uneasy look on his face, and left her in the care of a man-servant who saw her to her rooms.

* * * *

Romera had insisted upon her going to see his wife, and she went. For hours she had paced the floor of her room, fighting her unwillingness. Was it kind for him to expose her to the remarks of one who for successive days would be near him?—With him?—His? And the thought almost crazed her. Then, when she was away from the city—far away—then they would talk about her. It would be so natural. The woman would think in her mind, "Poor little fool, she shall never have him," and would always speak of her as curious, and never fail to remember and tell him all the mean things she should read of people who in any way resembled her. And she would pretend to admire hideous heads of copper hair. She would tell him, that Aimée was only a child, that the tears were in her eyes almost all the time they talked, carefully omitting to tell him what called them forth; and that, like all babies, she would forget. That she did not have any idea the girl really and truly loved him, for she was too young, and would soon have another sweetheart. Then she might even make remarks about her costume, and tell him her gloves wrinkled. Oh! All this she pictured,

and then the pretty chime of the clock jarred upon her ears, and she knew it was six o'clock, and that in fifteen minutes she would be enduring the ordeal of her life. She would be in the presence of a woman of that class who could break the Decalogue and feel no reproach. She did not go down at once, and tried to calm herself with the thought that the woman would be kind. Romera had said she would be kind to her, and not say rude things and wound her. And when she had asked him to be there, he had promised, so really it would not be so bad after all; she felt somehow that he *must* hear all that was said—that he would.

And under the most tense nervous strain, accentuated by sleeplessness and a tonic, she took a cab and was soon at their flat. Had it not been for the delay occasioned by a slight mistake on the part of the footman who answered the bell, she would certainly have fainted.

They met, and Romera was not there. Why? Her courage sank and her heart failed.

His wife! This woman was the wife of the man Aimée loved. She wore a rich, trailing house-gown of deep red velvet and white lace, meant to be impressive. But the girl noticed, perhaps maliciously, that the style was old, and although she was Romera's wife her face was homely and her hair coarse. The latter she

could scarcely believe. Her figure was short, round and expressionless. Yet how she tried to like her! She must; she would! Did not Romera? Why was he not there? And the great tear-drops came. Oh, how wretched she was. If she only had not come; why had she not died on the way? But Romera had said the woman was kind, and thus reassuring herself she sank into the chair near the door, and as far away from the woman as possible.

"I am guilty," she said, in a low, tremulous voice, "of loving the husband of another woman." And then she paused, her head downcast. "Since babyhood I have known right and wrong," she continued. "I know it is wrong—wicked—but, somehow, I kept forgetting it, and oh, I love him so!" and she raised her eyes luminous with fever and the passion of unshed tears to those of the woman she felt she had wronged. "Forgive me," she pleaded, and as the stony face did not relax a muscle, she went on in a low voice, but with a burning fervor amounting almost to wildness, "I love him more than you could in ten thousand eternities. I know I am not old and wise like you, but I will grow older, and I do love him! I sometimes think I have loved him since the first time I ever looked upon his face. He is all I have in the world," she continued piteously.

"Believe me, I did not think of his ties; even when he mentioned them, they did not seem serious to me; we were so happy, and I never could think of the future in anything. That was left out of my nature. It is no girl's fancy—do not degrade me by even dreaming such a thing. I will love him forever. It was my first love, and will be my only one. A woman loves one man once in her life, and she never loves another." All this she said rapidly, her face turned from the woman who watched her narrowly, and when she had finished, and turning her head, saw how little impression her words had made by that hard, unfeeling stare, the color fled from her face and she sank back in the chair, deathly pale.

Romera had told his wife something of Aimée's life and its trials, which the girl had never acknowledged as such, even to him, and strange viscissitudes, and he really was not to blame for having her talk with his wife; he thought she would be kind to her, especially when she saw her young, fair and of gentle birth. Perhaps she meant it when she told him she would. But when the girl had finished this most natural outburst of emotional affection, considering her years and inexperience, she felt such a profound hatred for her that it was uncontrollable.

She was a woman, and she knew well that

Aimée's nervous condition and the submitting to an interview showed inherent courage on the part of the girl, and that it proved the virtue and truth of her budding womanhood. But—she had called her old; and then what would the world say if her husband should desert her for anyone else?

So, regardless of humanity, promises to her husband, and all save her own selfishness and ire, she chose her course. It would be unjust to say that this course was entirely unpremeditated; she had insisted upon her husband absenting himself from the interview, and for these very reasons.

Therefore, the very first words that fell on the tender, bared heart of her sensitive victim like molten lead, were, "So you deliberately planned to drag him down, did you?"

This, in reply to Aimée's penitent, truthful confidences, shocked every fibre of her being, and made her turn cold with horror. Was she a human being? A woman? Romera's wife? It could not be. And she experienced a sharp pain at the thought of his having said she would be kind, and not ask any questions. She knew well-bred people never do the latter, and had wondered at the time why he even mentioned that.

And unconsciously, even her idol became the least bit human by the thought.

"Oh, no, no, no, no," she cried in agony, which must have pleased her torturer. "Oh, no, no; I am good and pure! I never thought at all—just only loved and loved! I could not resist! It was such a beautiful thing to enter my solitary life. How could I resist? I had no mother to warn me, and no father to protect or advise; no one save my old black mammy. Go to her and learn of her that she has kept me and been at my side my whole life. Oh, is this love?" she cried. Then indignantly raising her proud head, "I will not believe I have dragged him down. Love cannot do that." And she thought of his love for her, how he had called her his good angel, and said he felt purer every time he touched her cool white rose lips. But she did not tell the woman these thoughts. They were too sacred, and she could not have understood them.

Aimée tried her best to make herself believe she had degraded her love, reviewing everything she had ever said or done; for she was a just and honorable person all through her whole body. For why should such things be said to her unjustly? Poor child; she had yet to learn her first lesson in the unkindness of the world. This was only the beginning.

Then the woman continued almost brutally, inflicting wound after wound:

"No one but me would believe, after reading your letter to him, that you were a good woman. It is just such a letter as a bad woman of the world would write, to the man she was trying to ensnare. He does not love you; he told me to have you come here, and to save him from you;" and she smiled a malicious smile as she saw Aimée's bosom swell, and the fine lace kerchief cover the eyes. "He told me to ask you—I am only telling you what he desires me to, what he has told me to say as coming from him—to leave the city. And the children! I have been his wife for years and borne him in agony his children; would you take him from them? There they are," and she pointed to a group picture of the sweet little darlings Aimée had so often kissed before she knew the mother, because they were his, and he carried the picture—that very picture. And she was almost frantic with the apparent enormity of the crime she had done in loving. She could not speak; she was too wretched. It seemed her heart was growing icy, and she could not endure the presence of her false accuser any longer. But when she attempted to rise to go, the woman only drew her chair nearer and kept on talking, as if she could never pain her victim enough.

Long afterward, when Aimée thought the interview over, it seemed too fearful to believe, yet she knew it had been just so.

And she asked the girl what she was doing in the city alone. Aimée told her frankly that she was a singer, and was singing the leading rôle in her own opera at the —— Opera House. She did not apologize nor state why, but the woman was furious.

"So you are the one, are you? I thought I had seen you before. Perhaps you will confess that you sang to my husband on the opening night; you were trying then, I suppose, to charm him. I said you were brazen at the time." And as she looked at her and saw what a pure-minded Southern girl she was, and realized that she was in truth alone and traveling with her old mammy, and that she was loveable, her hatred increased.

Aimée did not deny having sung the song, but she did not explain at all. Then the woman inquired about her birth and parentage, and when she learned from the girl's frank statement that she possessed neither, the clue was at last found which opened the doors to Aimée's pride, and by which this unprincipled woman drove her from the man who loved her.

"And you would marry a man and bring him no name! A man of the public; a man of

honor?" she questioned through the sinister, small eyes. "Not content with dragging him down, you would have him make you—a nameless actress, perhaps 'illegitimate' (you have told me no details, so I may suppose so)—Mrs. Romera—giving you one of the best names in America. If you had an illustrious name, such presumption might be pardonable, but an actress,"—she never said musician,—"whose parents have never been heard of," and she seemed inspired by demons of torment.

"And the picture—I believe you have his picture," she said, but still Aimée said nothing. She could not.

That, too! oh! that all her precious treasures should be thus dragged before this woman; and she shuddered, and a great, bold tear fell on her black glove.

"I am not emotional," the woman went on, as if sympathizing with her, galling to Aimée, who unconsciously moved back a little from her. "Mr. Romera told me that you were clever, and a musician" (this in a tone as if Aimée had just taken her first music-lesson). "Why don't you go away and study more? and by a few months you will be over this, and he will have forgotten you long before that." Oh, how it stirred wickedness in her heart; she had never felt such queer feelings toward anyone before. "He was

only making believe he loved you because I was not here. You *are* handsome, and have a sweet face. What a little fool you are. Why, he told me he did not love you." And so she continued for an hour.

Then Aimée rose in all the dignity of her young womanhood and filled with the indignation of her wrongs. Her face was like marble, and its flashing eyes gleamed almost as black as her dress. She was strangely and suddenly strong. Very strong. Must she believe he did not love her? Hard as it was, she did not shrink, and the matron cowered before the fire of the beautiful eyes.

"Woman," she said in a low, intense voice, but still musical, "you are not worthy the love of so noble a man as your husband. I will do anything he desires, and as it is to leave the city, I will go at once." That was all.

"When?" asked the woman.

"To-morrow," Aimée replied, and even such a woman knew she would keep her word.

But as if for lack of anything else to say, she said: "I suppose you'll want your letter; I'll mail it to you as soon as you leave; where will you go, where shall I address it?"

"I do not know," Aimée truthfully answered, for at that moment she had not even the vaguest idea. Nor did she care. But she would have

taken any train anywhere rather than break her word, or fail to please the man she had loved.

"And about the children," Aimée said abruptly, as if eager to vindicate herself; "I loved their faces; I love all children. Besides, I have kissed that very picture and loved them because he did, and they were his. I loved everything he loved or had loved," she said, and then, impetuously—"even you, before I saw you." It was most innocently said, but it scored heavily against her with this woman. "It is for the sake of the 'babies,' as he calls them, that I go, and for his sake.

"Then the picture," she continued. "I asked him for the picture, and had it framed in such a pretty white enamel frame. You can have it—I'll send it to you. Only take good care of it," she pleaded, almost childishly. "I wanted it because I liked the eyes; they had in them that charming gleam of merriment that always jumped into them when I told him he was handsome, or when he sang comic songs to my improvised music. I somehow—forgive me—felt I had a right to that special expression. It was mine; I never saw him smile so to anyone else, only when alone with me, and I fancied he must have been thinking of me when the artist caught it. I know it all seems foolish to you, but I do a great many foolish things. You can have it,

and everything else you want that he has given me. Oh!" she exclaimed, as if pained, and the woman never knew why she held her left hand on her throat during the remainder of the interview. It was as if to protect the tiny heart set in diamonds, his first gift, and containing his hair, and which she had never unclasped since he placed it round her white throat; and her ring with the date of their first acquaintance, and his name for her engraven in it. She could never part with them.

She had told a falsehood about the picture. Romera had surprised her with it, and it was like tearing away her flesh to part with it—to give it to her, but she wanted to protect him. If he desired to live with this woman, Aimée should never tell her anything but that he had always been true to the woman who had married him. What if he had been true to her all the time, and deceiving Aimée as she had said. No, he loved her best—his Aimée—he had told her so only yesterday.

Then, as if from one extreme to the other, her mind reverted to that one sentence, "dragged him down," and she felt an undisguised contempt asserting itself. He a grown man; twice her age! And the thought suddenly dawned upon her that perhaps he did not love her; because if he had, the fatal letter would have

afforded him an excellent opportunity to declare for her and protect and defend her. And then his not being present, as he promised, rose as in evidence against him, but he had said something, in that horrid street, she remembered vaguely—something about walking home with her after it was over. Perhaps he was waiting for her at the door. These thoughts flashed through her mind as she said "Good-evening."

At the door the woman extended her hand, and asked Aimée to write to her. "Write to her?" Never, she thought, with all the hauteur of her twenty years. She said nothing, and did not take the proffered hand. She could not, for she knew in her heart she hated a woman who could make such a proposition after the events of that evening. And somehow it detracted from all she had said, and made her doubt its truthfulness. As the heart-broken girl descended the steps, she murmured to herself, "from envy, hatred and malice, and all uncharitableness."

Romera was in the next room. He was restless and unquiet. He knew how Aimée would feel at his apparent neglect, and could see the reproach in her eyes when he should next meet her. "She is such a tender, sensitive little thing," he said to himself, as he paced up and down. "God! any man would love her." He could not hear her voice, and it seemed to him

his wife would never cease talking. What was she saying? Of course it was kindly. He never for an instant doubted that. No one *could* be cruel to Aimée, she was sweet and ladylike. When at last he heard the door close, he felt an almost irresistible desire to rush out and take her in his arms and kiss away all her perplexities and doubts, but his wife joined him shortly after the girl left.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### DISENCHANTMENT.

"Philosophy will clip an angel's wings."

KEATS.

Aimée went alone to the cab which was waiting, and to her hotel. Rachael came into the hall to tell her she had company, the manager and friends, as she entered, and a strange lady, putting her arm round the black-robed figure, ushered her into the parlor before a crowd of people who all, after introductions were over, urged her to play. And she did not care what became of her or what she did. She rather wanted to play; since childhood she had driven away her little troubles by music. Perhaps if she refused to play they would want her to talk or recite, or, worse still, play whist, so she went at once to the piano when she felt they really wanted to hear her. And such playing! Wild, passionate strains of melody followed by soothing, prayer-like chords that were almost sublime. She never knew what she had played. It had come to her then and there. She forgot

the people, and when the last sad pæan died away, and some one asked for a song, she found every body still and quiet, and one old man in tears. The manager, a perfect gentleman, who had been so kind to her in her illness, thanked her in behalf of the company, whereupon all insisted on "more music"—"a song." But he saw she was laboring under some kind of a strain, and had intuition enough to know it was no slight cause that had inspired such music as the fragile convalescent with alarmingly bright eyes had just played. He was a reader of human nature. As soon as possible he told them she had been quite ill, and he feared they were taxing her strength. Rose Fialge gave him a grateful glance, and the company soon left.

Then she threw herself upon her bed, and spent another night of dry-eyed agony.

For three days after the interview she was unconscious. Girls never forget a thing like this. A day dropped from a life marks a turning point. Saw you ever a rose pulled up by its roots and thrown away for a day. Then did you see the kind stranger gather it up and carefully and tenderly replant it. He gets the richest new earth, straightens the clinging tendrils so delicately, and plants it upright and firm. He cares for it every day until he almost loves it—yet—yet—do not the beautiful big leaves fall off, and are

not the bright petals a little dry and warped at the edges? They never come right. The bud was blighted forever.

When Aimée again opened her eyes to consciousness, she found strange faces all around. They were kindly, and one sweet woman kissed her forehead as she felt for the pulse. She lay quiet a few minutes, then asked if anyone had inquired for her, and was told no. And she wondered how she could ever have loved a man who did not have it in his soul to feel her illness, and, for humanity's sake alone, interest himself in her grief. And the demon of hate slowly advanced a pace, and breathed to the melody of Verdi's Aria, very gently to her weak senses, "Hate, hate, hate; Oh, you hate your love; ha-a-a-a-a-te," her breath following every quaver, and she slept in the arms of a fiend that cannot be easily vanquished. It was the first time she had voluntarily slumbered since the last night she slept with her finger tips resting in fancy lightly on Romera's beautiful head.

The next day, like a smiling, gay ghost, she insisted on being dressed, and tried to be well and grow strong again. She knew now she must work.

She told the manager they would leave New York at once, absolutely refusing to give any reason. They would go abroad, and when he

suggested returning later, she would not think of such a thing. He would have been very angry, only he knew she was passing through something terrible, she was so white and quiet. He liked the young actress. He had found her so different from any he had ever known, and so the matter ended by his doing exactly what she wished. The four nights now lost had cost them heavily, and Aimée Arno left New York in debt, as well as in sorrow.

And can you wonder at her unspeakable anguish? From the Alpine pinnacle of anticipation, in sight of all its alluring trophies, she had fallen precipitously into the slimy swamp of doubt. Its stiff, cruel barb like grasses of contempt, fed by the thick green foam of jealousy at each root, had pierced her tender flesh and tortured her very soul.

After feeling the soles of her feet too tender to tread the broken glass of reality, imagination—which in that delicate bosom united the whole of womanhood, from the violet-hidden reveries of a chaste young girl to the passionate desires of the sex—had led her into enchanted gardens where, oh, bitter sight! she now saw, springing from the ground, not the sublime flower of her fancy, but the hairy, twisted limbs of the black mandragora.

She believed most of the horrible things told

her at the interview, for she, so truthful and open-hearted herself, never doubted others, but naturally regarded all as equally far removed from petty falsifications and intrigue.

But bruised and broken as she was by the sudden fall, involving as it did the shattering of her only idol, she did not dare despair, and her unrecognized royal blood stood her well. Nature, however, asserted itself, and she fell into a state of comatose numb depression lasting for hours that was pitiful to see. The very flowers in her room, big-hearted Jacques, seemed to hang their heads as if it were rude to witness her grief. Like all beings subject to extremes, she had mounted high and her dejection was as low. She drank even too deeply of the cup of disillusion. She was crushed, but as flowers are by the summer rain which makes them all the stronger to revive and glow with greater beauty. And so she raised her proud head, and although she may have felt the heavy yoke, her neck was not bent, and none knew.

She well knew that her sorrow had been caused by the largeness of her hope, and that it would have proved fatal, had she allowed it to become a disease. Sometimes she tried to imagine she had succumbed to grief for good and all—had become yellow with melancholy, and ceased to

sing, and then she was so happy to know she had not been so cowardly.

But how did she feel toward Romera? Ah, she asked herself that same question more than once! In the months that followed she answered it in many ways.

She knew too well for her happiness that she would never, never, marry him without a name. Her pride would not permit it after the mocking words of the woman called his wife (who was herself, although Aimée never knew it, born in the worst kind of obscurity) no, never! And so she lost hope, too, temporarily, for she had no way of ever finding her parents. Poor girl! Life was hard.

If she only might see him once more, she thought, as she pressed her throbbing temples. He *must* not see her, but she had loved him well and might never see him again. And the desire grew.

In the afternoon, before she took the train, the manager, in pity for her nervousness and anxiety, although he had no suspicion of its cause, insisted upon her walking with him, to which she reluctantly consented. She disliked to leave the hotel, for she somehow felt Romera would come to her; would know of her grief and come to help her, and tell her it was only a horrid dream and that it would be all right.

She thought as they walked, If she might only kiss him good-bye. Only just once. Good-bye forever. With the courage of a despairing woman who realizes she must kill a love that has been her life, she resolved she would. She thought it all out while the kind-hearted manager talked to her in the cool park. Though she heard him, her mind was busy with her plans.

When they returned to the house they found Romera had called twice and had just left. Maybe it was as well she had not talked with him. Did not the fact of his living with the other woman prove that he had never loved Aimée? Could it be possible? But her love had been very, very deep, and the fact of his calling waked it all.

The train at which her maid was to meet her was to leave at one o'clock at night. She was to sing in Philadelphia a week, while arranging to go abroad. She left the house in a carriage alone, refusing company, at eleven. She gave orders to the cabman, after he had turned the first corner, to drive to a large key factory in a little, old street, a place she had often heard about, and to bring some one to the carriage, as she would not get out. She would pay him well.

They found everything closed up, but the cab-

man, impressed by Aimée's earnestness, roused the keeper, and soon she had a key which she was so certain would fit the lock she had in mind, that she only took two others in case it should fail; paid and thanked the man, and drove rapidly uptown.

The reader is probably anxious to know her plan of action. It was a bold and daring feat, but she was a rash young girl relinquishing a lover, and nothing could daunt her. It was a comparatively easy matter.

The night of the interview, while waiting on his doorstep for her heart to stop beating so loud, she had nervously and thoughtlessly applied the keys on her ring which she held in her hand, and laughed as the lock yielded to one of them. Then she had pulled the bell, and thought no more about it until walking with the manager. She knew Romera's room; he had pointed it out to her, and as she passed its door after the never-to-be-forgotten talk with his wife, so attentive had she been to all that was his, that she knew the exact shape of the lock. They arrived at the stopping place at ten minutes after midnight. She gave the man a dollar, and told him to wait for her. As she approached the house she saw a faint light in Romera's room She was glad of that, for she would not stumble over anything and wake the household, and she

smiled at the thought. It did not seem to her she was doing anything wonderful or daring. On the contrary, what was more natural than that she should want to kiss her lover good-bye? Was it not forever?

The lock yielded. The next one yielded, and she was on the stair leading to his room. With a little click the last lock, too, yielded to her new key. She was perfectly calm and possessed, and not at all surprised. Midnight hush and silence was all around her. There was the bed, a massive affair of heavy mahogany, and in the dim light she could see his face on the pillow. One plump wrist and beautiful hand, and she even noted the tiny red quilling of the silk night-shirt covering the arm, was thrown over his handsome head in the careless grace of profound slumber. His face wore a troubled look, and as she stealthily approached the bed he moved and murmured—*her name.* How she wanted to fling her arms round his neck and tell him she was there; that she loved him, and always would; that she had stolen away and come to him to say good-bye; to kiss him once more. But she restrained herself by burying her blushing face in the bedclothes at his feet. Then she knelt by his side and prayed softly in a light whisper, her breath moving his silky hair: "Oh, Lord, if I have done this great and noble

man any wrong, forgive me. Keep me good and pure, and make him happy." Then she merely touched her soft lips to his, but he opened his eyes and smiled to see her there, closed them dreamily, framing her name with his lips, while one hand fell and rested gently its taper finger tips upon her brown curls, as if in farewell benediction, and she left him smiling in his sleep.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### HATE AND ITS TERMINUS.

"But hushed be every thought that springs
From out the bitterness of things."

—WORDSWORTH.

Aimée Arno attached more value to words, looks, and even thoughts, than do ordinary people. As one of Romera's looks had been a treasure beyond all price, so did the slightest doubt of his sincerity become deadly poison. But it did not act instantaneously; her love did not die, but became what she tried to believe was hatred. And so it was his image was called before her by trifling circumstances, such as the movement of the heart along its chain over the smooth, white throat, or by some thoughtless remark about the absence of all rings on her hands. She had never taken the heart off; "No one knows it is here, and why should I?" she thought to herself. And rings? When she had lived and loved, her delight was to wear great solitaires and flashing marquises, but now she could not bear to see anything save the one glis-

tening, pure band; and though sometimes she imagined it hurt her, scorched her flesh, she never removed it. And when his face rose before her, it was tenderly she first glanced at it, in recollection of the beautiful, inexpressible sweetness of their first love. Then, with wonderful and cruel alacrity, thoughts would envelop her. Different things would demand explanation. Unmercifully and without sparing her one demon of doubt would ask her why Romera had failed to be at the interview—broken his promise to share her torture—that was the hardest of all and usually first to appear. Then another would drag forth its creaking skeleton demanding a reason for his ever speaking to a third person of what had been so dear and sweetly sacred between them two. And yet another livid-faced imp held aloft as on a scroll and reviewed every detail of the result of the fatal letter. And when the "He told me to say he does not love you" came back to her with its every intonation of that woman's voice, the zenith of her despairing doubt was reached, and she would declare with hot, burning cheeks, how she hated him. "Hate him! I hate him!" she would say aloud. Then, as wave after wave of humiliation swept over her soul, she was almost mad. "I do not see how I ever loved such a man," she would say. And as the wild thought

of how she had, in her nervous excitement, pleaded—yes, even quenched her innate pride, and cast her bared soul literally at his feet, only to be met by a practical, cool, calculating—she could not say those fearful words, but with an agonized *O-h-h-h-h*, she would end—this sensitive young creature—by throwing herself on her face and abandoning herself completely to misery. And then, at these times, her good angels would send sweet, oblivious sleep to the tired mind, and she would awake able to banish all thoughts of her lost love for hours at a time, and perhaps it would be days and even weeks before she would again think of him except to say over, as if to make it more certain, to convince herself, "Yes, I do hate him," and then, perhaps, she would add, childishly, "Anyone that could do such things to a trusting, simple person like me." And the blood would almost burn her in its mad deluge over face, throat and breast, as she thought, "What if he laughs about it all now?"

If she believed all the heartless woman had told her, can it be marveled at? But perhaps the next time—the very next—her happy past would overwhelm and cover up all the goblins of despair save the consciousness that he had not evinced the slightest interest or concern in her last illness, just before she left New York. No one had told her, and she had never known that

he, too, strong man as he was, had been prostrated by the rapid succession of disasters, and she did not know until long after that he had written to her hotel again and again. On the contrary, she was quite sure he had not even, as she told herself, written a line or expressed as much interest as she would have done the merest acquaintance alone in a strange city. "Yes, I hate him!" and she felt almost angry. Then a spirit of revenge would try and rear its snaky head, and she would even sometimes go so far as to formulate wild plans in order to make him humiliate himself before her. She fancied she should never be satisfied until she had heard him again beseech, implore even with tears, entreat her to be his, as he had in order to lead her to that frank, foolish statement of her wishes and desires. And she would try to apologize to herself by saying that she had not slept, and she was sure he had always meant all he said to her. He had always borne an honorable reputation, and she had had implicit confidence in him. But she thought, "I believe everybody, and why not? What object could anyone have in trying to deceive me or tell me a falsehood? And, oh, horrible thought! what if he had only been amusing himself with her all the time? And so she would continue spending hours to discipline herself in a hatred that one second's sight of Romera's

noble face would dissipate. It would vanish as mist before the first reflected ray of his love. And in these spasms she would conclude that she could never, never love him again. No matter what he should do, what he should tell her by way of palliating his crime, it would only increase her hatred.

She was not one of those women who delight to send men by their coquetry into that state of exquisite purgatory which poets try to delight in singing; she had given herself without doubts or deceptions to a man she had never even dreamed was unworthy; had existed for weeks in the perfect infantile and infinite security of his love. Every hole and corner of her pride was offended by what she now knew. If Romera had only talked lightly of love, or jested of devotion, or sneered at sentiment, or anything to have prepared her a little for the awful fate which her love had met, she felt she might have forgiven him. But he had dwelt with such fervor on the beauties of eternal union, and life-long comradeship. "He is almost a fiend," she would say indignantly, "Yes, he has lived so long with that woman that he has become like her. What I knew and loved was his young boyish self, his boy soul nearest the enchanted fountain sparkling at the brim of life. It must have returned

for a little while in his absence from her dire and dreadful influence.

"And now that I know all this, I cannot love him. My life is ended, even if all were proven untrue; even if after that she should die and I find parents, I could not."

It would be like cutting away the wings of a bird and expecting it to hover over you. She felt that her wings had been cut and the powers of her spirit broken. It pleased her to think and say she had lost all confidence in human nature. Poor child; still a child. She forgot that the wings of young birds soon grow out again more beautiful than ever, and that the proof of love lies in two things, suffering and happiness.

"Yes, I hate him!" and she would say it before her mirror, and curl her lips and smile. "I never really loved him, I was only pretending, just trifling with him!" Then with a peculiar light in her eyes she would walk to one of the windows, or where she could see the sky, and gazing into it until a tender light diffused itself in the melting eyes, and irradiated her whole countenance. "Oh," she would murmur in intensest emotion, and clasping her hands to her breast or over her face, "Oh, my heart, my heart, I do love him!" while dry sobs convulsed her frame.

Romera had kept the whiteness of his soul,

and that was why Aimée had loved him. Now she felt a contemptuous scorn for one who could forget. Was it possible she had loved such a man—one who had sworn he adored her, and had talked of their marriage so confidently, and one who *could* forget all when the unforeseen climax came? Had her young affections run to waste, or watered but the desert? The pleasure of love is in loving. We are happier in the passion we feel than in that we excite, and she felt, at times, that she could never again even *respect* the man who had thus wounded her, let alone *love* him. And her thoughts were so deep—as much deeper than speech, as feeling is than thought. And she seemed to talk with all her past hours with Romera, and to ask them what report they bore to heaven, and to ask them, so greatly wise, if she had done unpardonable wrong. Then she questioned herself. If her lover had told her of love and felt none, was she not justified in detesting him? And first her delicate heart would glow with resentment, then burn with love. Ah! Aimée,

"Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### BITTER REALITY.

"The light of love, the purity of grace
The mind, the music breathing from her face,
The head whose softness harmonized the whole,
And oh! that eye was in itself a Soul."

—Byron.

Russell Romera was a strong man. The trials and hardships of his early life in his adopted country, had left him with a wonderful constitution. Nevertheless, the experience with Aimée prostrated him, and it was not strange. He had never before loved, and the recent fatalities had been so sudden, and although he had written as best he could again and again, and had received no reply, he did not wonder, for what woman could write another letter under the circumstances? He did not know at that time that Rose Fialge had been forced by his wife to leave the city; indeed, he had heard very little about the interview. And even in his mind it would have been difficult to imagine any person so heartless as to send a young girl, especially one situated as

was his Aimée, into the world in the manner attributed to him. During his illness he feared for her—feared she, too, might be ill, and when he saw by the papers a few days later that the young genius was creating a great *furore* in Philadelphia, he was relieved, for it told him she was well, or at least strong, and he loved her better for such strength. Again he wrote her, and had his valet mail the scrawly missive with the utmost care; and only a few hours later learned that she had sailed, and he grew rapidly worse, until his inexplicable malady became newspaper talk, none dreaming of its character, or ever even accidentally striking the truth in their daily surmises, as papers sometimes do.

Romera had forgiven Aimée everything. At first he had felt like chiding her as being the cause of all his trouble and subsequent distress, but only for a moment. His fine sense of honor and right told him that she was not in the least to blame, for had he not insisted upon her answering his urgent note, the one he had left at the hotel that fatal day, with the flowers? And he smiled in the curves of his lips as he thought how the pure lilies had been party to such a tragedy.

And it came to be he could not sleep as he thought of her on the sea. She had never been on the ocean, and he knew that she needed care.

His heart went out to her as it had never before, until she became the ideal of his soul, and the dream of his senses. And he felt something within him that was almost sublime, as he thought how the beautiful flower-like soul of this young girl, so glorious, single, so intoxicating in its fragrance, had been his—his before any eye had blighted it—his *forever*. She had said *forever*. Did he not understand as none other could, holding and cherishing all her secrets and soul treasures? She should not be dragged through the vulgarities of life, and it almost maddened him to think how she had gone from him so unprotected. It should not be; he would follow her, and be near in case she needed him. His was a noble moral nature, and Aimée's strongest hold on his love was that she had recognized and appreciated this. He felt a little wounded at first that she had not sent him any farewell word—absolutely nothing; "But, poor child," he thought, "she was unused to life's thorns and they hurt her worse than I know."

Over all the continent he followed her, and when he had so completely failed to win her smile, even when he saw she recognized him once in London and once in Paris, he began to despair. She looked beautiful, but too soulful from the eyes, he thought, longing to clasp her

to him; but he knew it would be useless to seek her; she would not see him.

He was alone with his physician, and although the climate and change were improving his health, Romera was far from happy. Often he found himself wondering if he would ever be happy without her; even as happy as he had been when she left him for Chicago; even that period, which had then been sad, he thought at the time, was now the subject of envy, and seemed bright, very bright, in comparison with the strange doubt which was slowly creeping into his mind. He loved her; had always. And she; could her successes and triumphs have dulled her heart and estranged it from him? Had he been too late to save her? No, it could not be! Romera knew Aimée Arno too well to nurture such a thought. And after such an outburst he would sit for hours absorbed in reverie, reviewing all those periods of his life which had been nearest to her, and recalling with vivid distinctness her pretty sayings to him, and her wonderful voice, its every inflection. How gayly and laughingly they had together delighted in cultivating their little garden of illusions.

"She was beautiful as sweet! And young as beautiful! and soft as young! And gay as soft! And innocent as gay," he said to himself.

How sweet, peaceful and perfect all their past

had been until that awful catastrophe, and it angered him to think that he had asked her to write—to seal their mutual doom. And he grew so much worse, that the doctor became alarmed.

"It's no use," he said, laughing, "life is a struggle, and the sooner it is over the better." And a few months later, on the next boat after the one which carried Aimée Arno and maid, they sailed again for America.

And so it was that while Romera was fostering and cherishing his love and reminiscences, wishing over and over he had never hesitated to take her before she became the famous woman she now was, Aimée was schooling herself to hatred, from a sense of justice, to revenge the humiliation of which Romera had no suspicion.

If Romera had but known what occurred at the meeting of the two women!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### REGGIO DEALRY.

"Small service is true service while it lasts:
Of humblest friends, bright creature! scorn not one:
The daisy, by the shadow that it casts,
Protects the lingering dew-drop from the sun."

—WORDSWORTH.

It was shortly after Aimée's return to America that she had a strange and unaccountable desire to re-visit the magnificent Southern hotel where she had spent what was perhaps one of the happiest days of her life. Romera had taken her there. It was the first time she had traveled to spend a holiday with him. There was nothing in the world to prevent her gratification of this fancy. She dressed herself just as handsomely as if he was to be with her; in fact, she pretended to herself that he was to call for her at a certain hour. Her maid went with her, and she carried the same parasol, a white one with one lone blue anchor embroidered on it, that he had used the other time to write her name on the sand, filling up the depressions made with the orange flowers they had gathered, until it

looked like a garden of fragrant blossoms, each breathing Aimée in its softly wafted odor. And she recalled, as they journeyed, how the yacht ride had made her sick. It was his private yacht. She had never been on the ocean before, and how she had hated to tell Romera lest he think it babyish, and a faint color stole again into her face as she remembered how he had divined it, and how tenderly he had carried her to the cabin and rested her head on his broad, comfortable shoulder and breast. She could almost feel the sickening sensation each slight rocking of the boat gave her, yet, as she thought how kind it had been of him to tell her, as she raised her head with its dead white face, and curls all tossed back from forehead and temples, that he had never seen her look handsomer. "Shows my true Aimée," he had said. And then she had replied "You are gracious; *merci!*" and had laughed and said she was almost well. All the *minutiæ* she recalled, so tenacious was the memory of her short-lived happiness. And then they left the yacht and walked up through a little village with such wee cottages, hand in hand, like country folks, to the railway station; and in the all too short ride on the train they had been the only passengers. He had arranged her cloak for her head and had admired her English glove-like shoes, and had called her a

"dainty thing, but you are only a baby," he had added. And then right along the beach they had found the quaintest carriages, and had taken one to the great and palatial hotel. It was late in the season and the hotel was almost deserted. And they had had such a delightful time, not a thing to mar, and had returned at night in the train, and Romera had told her such charming stories, and had asked her much about herself, and had given her the shining gold band, slipped it on her finger forever, he had said, lest someone else should see what was on the inside; and she involuntarily pressed it to her lips through the tinted glove, and the landscape seemed to glide by no more rapidly than did her thoughts in the kaleidoscope of the past.

"Ah! Think we're he'ar," the maid's low voice broke in on her mistress' long, long reverie, and they left the train and were driven to the identical hotel. It is strange how youth will insist and persist in reviewing the past, even though it may produce painful emotions in its inevitable sense of loss. Strange that when, after a toss in the waves, in the very same hat and bathing-suit she had worn on the former occasion, and after a stroll on the very same stretch of beach, when she entered the dining-room she almost intuitively sought the very

green and flowery nook which, too, held its memories.

This conservatory-like corner seemed a dream to her now. A little while ago it had been a paradise, and a pair of dark eyes smiled into her own just opposite. Why would her heart beat so turbulently? The pungent sweet odor of an orange plant behind her, stirred her deeply. With what an irresistible power a remembered odor can sweep aside the vista of years, with its volumes of wise resolves, and make the past live again! And so this susceptible, hot heart again vibrated and pulsated in the ecstasy of her youthful ardor, and her cheeks were flushed.

"What a delightful surprise!" a low, mellow voice said, bending over her head, and she raised the impassioned eyes from their abstracted contemplation of the face of her tiny jeweled watch—she had meant to look at the time when she first sat down—raised them up to those of the deepest blue which bent over her. It was Reggio Dealry, the *fin de siècle* poet. She had last seen him in Paris, and he had told her he loved her. She respected him highly, because he had seen her indifference to him, and had not pressed his suit. Now a little shiver ran through her as she looked up, and in that one, swift glance realized how utterly indifferent and unwelcome he was to her at that moment, at any time; how deathless was

her first young love, and the syllables of Romera's name fluttered in her very breath.

"No, I'm not sorry he has come, I'm glad," she thought. "I have been reminiscencing too long, more than is good for me already," and she felt that strange pain at her heart as she talked with him. Felt that she might have loved him, had she never known Romera. She was ever frank with herself, and although she was at times strangely drawn toward this man, she knew she would *never* love him, and had told him so long ago.

Dealry was of excellent origin. He owed his prosperity, in the first place, to the talents with which nature had endowed him; and in the second, to singular good fortune. His amiable disposition and excellent character gave a scope to the course of felicitous circumstances, which, among men of genius, is frequently checked by their impetuosity and thoughtlessness, or by the proud sense of independence attendant upon their organization. Dealry had outgrown most of his follies.

If ever a man was born a poet, it might be said of Dealry. His whole manner of life, not less than its remarkable vicissitudes, exemplified the poetic character, as it is idealized in our minds. To be sure, the price of greatness must be paid in labor and suffering, by every man

who would distinguish himself in any way above his fellow-creatures, and the poet as well as the statesman must be humbled, endure mental and personal hardships, in the same degree that he is exalted above the common lot. Through what a train of events, romantic, touching and diversified, his fame had come, few knew, but one was destined to know. One, a woman, young, but not unknown to sorrow.

He was a poet in everything and at all times. Smiles and tears, rapture and agony, hope and despondency. After he left his father's home of luxury, he became a poor student without a cent, then the gifted professor, the generous friend, the delight of ladies, and finally the admiration of the world. Such was he, and such had been the changes of his state.

When he met Rose Fialge, all America was listening to the voice of his song, but heard not the cry of his soul; he was in the meridian of his glory as a poet, and in the depths of despair as a man. That was why once he quoted to her, soon after their meeting, Tasso's lines:

"Thou who to Pindus tak'st thy way,
Where hangs my harp upon the cypress tree,
Salute it in my name and say,
I am bowed down with years and misery,"

And in her ignorance she had wondered at their vehemence, and his fiery eyes.

Nature had been liberal in the scope of genius with which she endowed the middle age of this poet. Sometimes it led him to depict the passions in their simplest and most energetic form, without the influence of manners. Then it was the wild, deeply interesting intricacy of plot which held the reader spell-bound; again the classical subjects were treated with peculiar felicity. In his later poems there was a tendency to a shadow of tragedy, and he told his young friend, for such they had concluded to be, that he had a constant fear of suicide. He must become its victim, according to his logic of hereditary principles. And she would tell him that as the chief attribute of true genius is to manifest itself, despite every obstacle or adverse circumstance, the same principle held as to the conclusion of a life. Had he not already overcome worse things than that morbid fancy? And she would speak playfully. But he only bent his head and frowned.

What wonder that the broken heart of a misguided woman should incline to such a man who favored her with his interest in her inexpressed and inexpressible troubles. With the subtle intuition of genius he felt her heart pangs, though entirely ignorant of their cause. More

than once, she had noticed that he would shield her whenever some remark was made which caused all the blood to leave her face to rush in mad whirls and swirls round her heart. And she marveled how he knew of that internal commotion.

In their subsequent conversations he confided to this sorrowful young lady, who strangely pleased his fancy, much of the story of his life, but nothing about his love.

At the age of twenty-five he had gone into the world with a fixed determination to succeed in order to drown the past. And so he came to be, through pressure of his will and circumstances, a restless, hard-working and homeless man (in the finer and better sense of the word) through the principal part of his life. At once pursuing fortune and fame in the determined hope of exalting his family by distinction in literature, and immortalizing not so much his own name as that of his mother, to whose memory he had so passionate an attachment as to be almost violent at times.

He had pursued his studies with indefatigable application, diligent in cultivating those talents which had given such extraordinary signs of power within him. He read all the old poets, but preferred the Latin, and Virgil beyond any other bore the palm in his imagination. He

grew so enamored of the graces of the *Æneid* that at one time he wrote a similar one in Greek for recreation. These were his two favorite languages. While riding horseback from his country home to the University one morning, he translated all of the *Agricola* of Tacitus.

He told her he had always anticipated real poetry to come, when years had matured his faculties, and his wings, after their first trials, should have acquired full vigor, and the strength which bears the eagle beyond other birds. Not that he was egotistical. No one would or ever had said that. No, he simply knew that his works were not caprices, but that he had laid hold of public feelings by a more serious kind of magic, and had hit the expiring taste of his countrymen by the completeness of his delicacies.

He, too, was alone at the famous hotel, and, by the young lady's permission, spent the remnant of the day with her. And Rose Fialge, as she wandered with him through the mysteries and beauties of Byron, Keats and Shelley, kept asking herself feverishly why she continued to cherish and foster this love for Romera; why could she not love Reggio Dealry; had she not decided months ago to hate? Was this being faithful to her promise to herself, and she suddenly and abruptly said aloud: "Listen!" and then sang very lowly to the tune she had made

for the words, the night she took them to herself:

"Ah, well! let it pass in silence;
We'll forget;
There are, doubtless, things to live for
Even yet,
And life has far nobler uses
Than regret.

"There are joys that wait our coming
Down the years;
Do not think that I shall meet them
But with fears,
That for me life holds no promise,
Only tears.

"Do not think that I shall idly
Sit and wait,
Watching with the old blind worship
Your fair fate.
This might once have been; now, truly,
'Tis too late.

"There are breezy heights my footsteps
Well may tread;
There's a future's radiant promise
Overhead.
Naught shall dim its light, not even
Words you've said.

"So we'll let the years slip from us,
Suns have set;
In your life may love and sweetness
Linger yet;
And for me—oh, Father, help me
To forget!"

How well, as she sang, she remembered that night. It was after the play in London. The night she had seen Romera. The paper in which she had found the words, was, strangely enough, an old number of a New York daily, and one which the maid had hastily thrown round the magnificent American beauties sent from his box during the evening, in order to protect the petals as she carried them to the hotel. And it was a strange coincidence, she thought at the time, that the lines should be situated in the paper right under a squib of some eight or ten lines stating that Russell Romera had gone abroad for his health. And she had tried to be glad he was ill, and, instead, had spent the night writing him tender letters only to tear all into tiny fragments, and throw herself upon the rugs with a dull pain at her heart, the words "to forget" on her lips, and the poem clasped to her.

She would hate him! As she had vowed it then, she strengthened that vow now, while singing to the poet. "Yes, I will be avenged. I will make him love me—love me more than he ever has! I will fan my wings of fame and fortune in his face until he thinks to grasp me—until he cannot sleep nor rest for the seductive zephyr. I will make him think I love him, and lead him into all sorts of trouble; will press my face so near his, and even let my breath caress his lips until he is

mad to embrace me. Lead him to give up his life to me, and all for me! Then spurn him. Tell him of my hate. Tell him no woman can thoroughly hate until she has loved and been wounded; laugh at his surprise. Tell him I have hated him for years; far longer than I loved him!" And her hands were clenched and her eyes flashing.

"Ah! I have hurt my hand," she said, aloud, as the blood stained her kerchief and nail. And as Dealry hurried away for a cup of water, she sighed heavily, and, looking out over the great, boundless sea, said: "I cannot—cannot; it hurts me—will kill me, and I have no mother." And she thought of the letters which Romera had written her, and knew he loved her.

When Dealry returned and was bathing the little hand, he again told the beautiful singer of his love for her, and that he recognized its hopelessness. "But, friendship will live," he continued breaking into poetry as he often did when excited or moved:

"It will live. No eyes may see it;
In my soul it will lie deep,
Hidden from all; but I shall feel it
Often stirring in its sleep.
So remember, that the friendship,
Which you now think poor and vain,
Will endure in hope and patience,
'Till you ask for it again."

"Mr. Dealry," Rose Fialge replied, "you are good, and only lately I heard generous praise of you, which still lingers in my mind. I trust we may ever cherish best wishes for each other."

He thanked her and saw her aboard the train, then bade her good-bye. It was for a long time, and their next meeting was under vastly changed circumstances.

So ended her trip. Had it benefitted her? And they returned to their Newport cottage.

## CHAPTER XX.

### FAME AND SORROW.

"Tho' fame doth hold a charméd cup
A draught that mantles high
And seems to lift this earth-born soul
Above mortality;
Take it away; to me but bring
The waters of affection's spring."

—ARCHER.

She had sung in Philadelphia with the same marvelous success, and the same merry light in her eyes, but her heart was broken. Then the company had sailed, and before Rose Fialge returned to America the world knew her name. She had not permitted the sorrows of her soul to ruin her career, because debt forbid it, in its practical, stern way demanding dollars instead of sighs, till at length her mind was diverted, and she welcomed the hour of each performance as a deliverance from her memories. The recollections of her love and happiness were fully as sad as were those of her misery upon hearing herself defamed for the first and only time in her life, because she believed, in her sober thinking

moments, that Romera had really never loved her; he had told the woman so, and she had never received even a line to explain anything after the horrible interview. To be sure, it had been her own pride that would not permit her to stay or see him. He had not kept his word about being present on that eventful evening, and she had never forgotten it, nor forgiven him. If he had only sent even a line stating some excuse. She would have been glad to believe anything he should have said, she sometimes thought.

Upon her return to America several letters were mailed her from the Plaza. They were all from Romera, explaining everything, and wiping away all her doubts completely. They had been written during the time she lay unconscious; one the very hour of her torment, and telling of his own, equally as severe as hers had been, if not more. The others were full of love and devotion, and in parts showed that he labored under great excitement, as he told her how hopeless his life would be should she fail to reply.

"Ah, that I had known it," Aimée thought, as she read them again and again. "But that was so long ago, two years, seven hundred and thirty and a half days." She had seen him in London, and at one of her matinées in Paris, but had not recognized him, although his appearance had

shocked her greatly. He looked ill. She had seen by the papers he was traveling for his health, but she did not even dream that he had followed her almost continuously since she left New York.

"I presume," she continued, this time aloud, "that he has forgotten me, as she said he would, long before this," but a tiny voice kept whispering that he had not; it was only a weak little voice at that time, but it was destined to grow and grow. But it was too late! *She had no name.* If he had only accepted her then, when her sensitiveness of having no pedigree was immersed and drowned in love! That day she had made her plea and been decided against. It seemed to her she had lived ages since that day.

It was shortly after the trip mentioned in the last chapter, while she was still resting at Newport for an indefinite period, that the beloved old servant—the mammy of her childhood—fell ill and died, and she was indeed alone. The faithful, true-hearted Rachael had understood Aimée, and was nearer to her than anyone had ever been, and her grief was terrible.

"Oh," she moaned, the day they took the body away, "what shall I do without her? To whom tell my troubles?"

And her heart yearned, casting all the past aside, for Romera.

And so it was that Aimée Arno at twenty-two was tired of life, and honestly so. Who shall blame her, or wonder? Had she not seen fame, the world, love and its following sorrow, and was not life's story for her all told?

She had gone to the summer resort under an assumed name, lest some of her admirers should follow her. She was wealthy, and might, perhaps, have been happy there had it not been for the dire calamity of that death. After the first reverting of her strange, sad heart to Romera, and her instant rejection of its appeal in that direction, it oddly enough turned to the life of her childhood. She longed to see the old place, and found herself every once in a while thinking of old familiar landscapes, and especially of the old curios and chair that her mammy had loved. She wondered how they all looked after such long years. And so the pretty, smiling young lady (for Aimée had always had the sweetest, merriest smile, just as if she were the happiest person alive, even in sorrow) gave up her cottage, and left for the South only a few days after the burial.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE VISIT TO THE HOME OF HER CHILDHOOD.

"I love thee purely, as they turn from praise,
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith,
I love thee with a love I seem to lose
With my lost saints—I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death."

—BROWNING.

When the slow, dirty train arrived at the smoky, dingy station, a feeling of revulsion almost made Aimée keep her seat in the car. Had she really lived there? No, she had not lived, and a shudder shook her form.

As she stepped to the platform she became aware of the people. Some one grasped her hands, others spoke, but she could not remember any of their names, and even their faces seemed coarser and—sooty, and she vaguely wondered if she would ever become like them. Then the same indefinite restless fear which she had felt so strangely each morning in the sleeper when she first awakened came, and held her as

in a vise all the way to the house. No one met her, no one knew she was coming. The tottery old darkey, who had driven the "express" ever since she could remember, handed her into a carriage, driven by a young fellow with down on his upper lip, who stared at Aimée in the flirtatious manner of his years, little dreaming that the short brown curls, and stylish black jacket belonged to his former school-ma'am.

Yes, it was Bennie Grimm. How he used to worry her in school, when she taught for his sick teacher, just for fun; and she fell to counting. She was almost fifteen then. Now she was twenty-two. Seven years. Bennie must be almost eighteen. He was older than the other boys and bigger; stronger, too, and she recalled how she had tried to shake him one day, and that night found her watch crystal broken into splinters. And after school he had said to her that his sister told him he was a "dummy" and that was what made him bad; and she could fancy she saw again the black blubbering tears which made clean river beds down his big cheeks. And she smiled.

Was that dark, murky building they were passing the new court-house? Oh, no. It had looked so white and clean when she left. But she knew it was, for there were the electric cars she had heard of, and the new electric lights.

How low and miserable the buildings looked. They were driving down a street called Broadway, and only five days before she had driven down another Broadway, in the country's metropolis. Then she felt grateful that it had not been raining when the train arrived. Then they passed the school-house; a great big symmetrical plain structure, and Aimée's eyes with an unconscious morbidness sought the two massive windows of the library in which she had learned to think instead of play. Again she imagined she sat alone, and cold from inaction, before its great cases of books.

She could have laid her hand on anything it contained. And she felt a childish desire to go in and be a girl again as if she had never left; never known Russell Romera. And as impulsively as in those halcyon days when the cup of life seemed so enchanted and sparkling, she called for the boy to stop. He did not try another of his smiles as he opened the door for her. She gave him a fee which startled the freckles on his face and made them appear darker than ever, and told him she would walk the remainder of the distance, and he need not wait.

The school was in the suburbs, near the St. Clairs' house. It was vacation, but she knew the building was open, and if not, she could go

down and get old Hurst, the janitor—he would know her. Yes, the storm door and the great door yielded easily, and memories of her apprehensive girlhood came surging over her in overwhelming force. With a throbbing heart she ran up the stairs and over to the organ which she used to play for the older scholars, and later for her own pupils to march to. She opened it and played. Quaint old things, almost forgotten, pathetically dropped from fingers which had not thought of "John Brown's Body," 'Marching thro' Georgia," or "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," for years. Then the echoes resounded through the vast, bare, deserted halls, and frightened her. It seemed so gloomy, almost sepulchral.

But it was only her eyes and nervousness. Then she jumped up, and ran as fast as she could, with that delicious, palpitating fear which children feel running past a dark bogie corner, up the next flight of steps—wooden steps, which resounded to every footfall—to the library. She took a weird delight in thrusting her lithe body tight up against the darkest walls, and into yawning corners in the several landings. Then thought, with its unfeeling, haunting memory, made her fancy Romera was standing in front of her holding out his strong arms for her. She stepped forward to clasp him, and "he will be

at the top," the taunting fiend whispered. Well she knew he would not, yet she was so fanciful. Was she suffering? She could not have told you herself.

There at last was the library door. How familiar it looked with its great brass gong, which appeared like a huge inverted wash-basin. She saw that put there years ago, and how she had begged to be allowed to pull the wooden handle and make it peal. The professor had humored her, and now she swung the heavy door open and sounded it again, once, twice. But it was not so musical as then, somehow, and she dropped it quickly with a sorrow in her, as though she had lost something; irrevocably. Then she looked round the old room, and a hot flash almost palsied her. There, right over the desk where she had always liked to sit, that had her monogram on its ink well, and from where she could see the windows of her room at the St. Clairs', sometimes the lace of its dainty curtains fluttering in the breeze, was a life-sized portrait of Russell Romera. She was spell-bound, and fell to saying aloud the letters of his name written so characteristically under the left lapel of the coat. She knew that very coat. Her head had once rested in serenest confidence right where those usurping initials now were.

They were laughing and wriggling in delight at her suffering. They should not be there.

It was her desk. Not changed a particle. There was her name "Aimée the haughty," which she had been compelled to dig into the iron with a pen when she lost a wager about the price of mercury once in the philosophy class. Yes, her desk, and she sprang lightly to the top of it and took down the portrait. Those letters should not be there. It was not easy, but that girl-woman took the picture down, unframed it, and drew a line—a long, wide black line—first chalk, then ink to make it resemble the other work, and again encased it in its glass and frame, and re-hung it. And she sank down exhausted, the tired aching temples pressed hard against the broad engraved buttons of her coat sleeves. How unlike his, any of the other pictures on the wall! What kind of persons had the others been, she wondered. There was homely Horace Mann. She had written an essay once upon his works before she had read one of them. How funny! She would not dare attempt it now. "That must have been some more confidence of ignorance," she said aloud. And how finely his head was poised. None of them could compare with it.

When she went, she left the door wide open, and ran. She was haunted and felt an irresisti-

ble desire to look over her shoulder every few minutes to see if some terrible hob-goblin was not pursuing her. Would he be displeased to know she had erased his name, she wondered? No, for he had once said he would love her no matter what she should do. And he had repeated it, and kissed her eyes.

Then she walked through the play-grounds, taking the "short cut" which led through the hedge in whose dense shade she had played "duck" so often, and entered the gate of the only home she had ever known. Evening had come, and she knew they were at dinner. How they greeted her, and what a world of anxiety she saw in the eyes of that great-hearted mother. Then all remarked her quietude, and one knew instinctively she was ill.

Don, her great St. Bernard, had not forgotten her. She was so glad. Never to have encountered a constancy equal to one's own is tragic; and this faithfulness, even if only in a dumb animal, in a manner palliated her suffering.

For weeks she lay in a kind of stupor. The soft face grew so white, and the eyes so lustrous in their largeness that even the little children tiptoed by her door, and the strange old nurse said, "'Deed, Miss Aimée seemed so fragile she doan't 'tend to 'low her to be kissed." But one day when the sun was high overhead she waked

and asked them to raise her quickly, and let her look out the window. They did, and one of the men led Sylph, her beautiful horse that had so often carried her over the country, to the door that she might see her. And when the docile creature put her pink nose familiarly in the well-remembered hand of her mistress, Aimée begged them to let her ride. The men and her little brother said she could, but nurse knew better, and said, "When you get strong, my chil'; drink this," and so Aimée took her first renewed interest in life, and her first nourishment since her arrival.

It was a palatial home—a magnificent home, and withal so peaceful and happy. It was indeed a household of love and harmony. In such a joyous atmosphere, surrounded by youth and beauty, Aimée caught the spirit of her childhood and grew well, so they finally moved her to her own rooms; her bon bons, she had been wont to call them, because they were rather smaller than the others. She was not so large as the real daughter, and so the *bijou* apartments suited her well. They were just as she had left them; no one had ever thought of changing them.

How odd it seemed to wander through memory back to the days when she had painted the pictures which adorned the walls, and imagined

she was destined one day to become a great artist. She had always imagined great things of herself. Perhaps it had only been the force of the undeveloped love within her.

The big leather bound volume of Dickens' "Tale of Two Cities" was open just where she had left it; and how yellow those two pages had become, Aimée thought. "The tint does not blend well," she remarked to herself, and turned the leaf over. What trifles she noticed and recalled. She had had that book in French for her birthday gift once. And what a trouble they had to get it. How good they had been to her. Yet, yet—and again that horror of her birth chilled her. But she laughed aloud. A cheerless, ghostly laugh, and said she did not care. She *would forget*, *would forget*, would live and be a nameless thing forever. Only—only she could not see the people of the village. They had not known her story, and the rumors about her obscure parentage then—*now* it was different—they all did. It had been in all the papers when that miserable old Mexican who kept the bank died--they had tried to find her through the papers then—which said he had left her a sum of money and a lot of trash and papers in a locked box. She had not cared then. What was such an event to her at that time? Had she not a life full of happiness and love? Romera

did not care whose child she was, he had said so; and she grew agitated. She should have known by that he never loved truly. "Oh, why had she been so blind? Help me hate him!" she said aloud, raising her soft eyes, now angry, to the billows of deep blue gray silk, their own sister color, which formed the ceiling of the boudoir. "And make me find my parents. Make me." Aimée had never asked the Lord to do anything out and out for her; only help her do it. It was in her, she felt; she knew; only she feared lest her purpose should weaken.

"How silly I am. First, I am going to live quietly and forget all! Then, with the next breath imagine it impossible. I wonder if one can quench the thirst of the spirit with the froth of superficiality? No, no! Her inner soul, pride and blood, replied. "Not even in a cut-glass goblet," and she sighed to feel her old fire returning.

Why, there was her old easel, with its proverbial unfinished picture. What it was, she had forgotten. She drew aside the pretty, embroidered curtain, and the merriest of laughter pealed through the apartments. It was labeled, "Joe Jefferson." "That is, it must have been meant to be going to be him," she said, convulsed with laughter. "I'm right glad I happened to put the name on it, or I might have taken it for—for,"

her head to one side, and finger to her lip, "for the newspaper likeness of—" She stopped abruptly, and the canvas never knew. Why would he always come into everything? Had she laughed? She knew Joe Jefferson now, and had often talked with him. How he would have enjoyed seeing that. When it was begun she had never seen a play of any sort, and had drawn the likeness, or unlikeness, from a crayon in the music hall where she had committed her graduation valedictory.

And that big head above the door! That was the one that had scared the baby, and that she had called "Hid-yus" (hideous). But that was before it was completed. It looked well now, and its broad white marble frame brought out the tints nicely, but the cheeks were a little too pink for the sad eyes. What had she called it? Oh, yes, "Grief," and she looked away, far out the windows to the Grove. That baby was now eight years old. And how much larger all the maples and rose acacias were, and how much more abundant than ever. They had often called Carlcort, the St. Clairs' home, "Acacia Place," in their girlishness, and she remembered with that strange minuteness which at times characterized her, of writing her "dearest Mamma" a love letter, and addressing it that way, to see if it would carry. And how sweetly her mother had

smiled when she read its glowing contents. Aimée had not then seen a little dainty trailing robe locked away in a dark drawer.

Then she drew aside the white and pale violet portières, and there was her own brass bed, with its low railing and high canopy, and beyond, through the dense white bead curtain, gleamed the whiter bath.

She remembered what a troublesome child she had been, and how they had humored her. The voluminous folds of the canopy were twice as high as those of other beds, because she told them she would breathe better so, and more angels could fly in with St. Agnes. Was her worn prayer-book still under the pillow? With a trembling hand she raised the satin lightness. Yes, and she pressed it to her lips over and over; then did a strange thing, ran through the house to the store-room and locked it safely away in her black traveling bag. Why?

Aimée knew, although she did not acknowledge it even to herself, that she would be using that bag again, and soon.

How strong she felt. She returned and sat down on the big white bear rug, taking its hard round head between her hands to see it grin. Then Malta, her old, old cat, with her big yellow *vert* eyes, came purring to her and nestled affectionately on her breast. Two hours later, when

the maid went to dress her for dinner, she found them asleep together. The long golden shadows of the setting sun fell slantingly on the rich copper curls forming an angular crown. A smile lurked in the deep, well-bred corners of the mouth, and she did not seem quite so pale as usual. She left them sleeping.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### DISCOVERY.

"For I have loved thee with a love
No mortal heart can show;
A love so deep, my saints in heaven
Its depths can never know."

—A. PROCTOR.

Girls so high strung as Aimée do not "get over" love, as the expression goes. That is one of the worst expressions on record. A lofty soul may amuse itself by listening again to little tunes on the lyre of love, but only to see how more than distinctly the discords and false notes come out. Having once found the ideal, the heart becomes too infinitely exacting by comparisons and recollections, to be ever able to duplicate its treasure, even though lost forever. A noble spirit shrinks from substituting an inferior as from crime. Well this young girl knew that it was only genius which could renew its skin like a snake, and hold her love forever. For in the matter of charm, as in everything else, it is only the heart that never grows old. What a pity it is that men and women of society,

of fashion, and airs and graces, have no friends who are friendly enough to tell them when the artifices of the mind begin to show their rusty edges like the massive railing in front of some brown stone houses, after the wear and tear of several seasons. Why does no one tell them that the fragrance of their modesty is stale; that the caressing glances known as having been in constant use on the stage of their social existence for ten seasons, have become but an echo? a heartless echo of sentimentality—not the natural sentiment of youth.

And Aimée, whether she thought in the deep leather bound window of the library—a favorite spot—or in the drawing-room with the family, or by herself sitting on the stump of a tree with only God's nature and her faithful dog, always reached these same conclusions. Only commonplace natures forget—can possibly forget; natures that have been blighted; hearts, perhaps once tender, that have been exposed to the frost and chill of the social world, until they become not unlike hand-organs. They can be played by anyone; but only a few melodies, which soon pall and become tiresome. The chords of Aimée's soul should never vibrate to the touch of any save a master hand, and his—Romera's—with whose genius none could compare; that she felt.

And so she took no interest in people. Old

acquaintances called, and ofttimes curiosity led them to call again, but she steadfastly refused to see anyone save the family. With them she felt she was indeed a child again. The mother dressed her hair in its now longer "ten-year-old curls," and she wore shorter dresses so she might better romp and walk. For days and days she lived most simply to the observer. But Don knew how she read with the greatest care all the papers and magazines. He alone saw her, sometimes tearfully, sometimes laughingly, sometimes frantically, tear up into very little jiblets, pages, and pictures, and columns, and phrases. Don had heard her recite things she read about, and extracts from speeches, while he lay wagging his tail and wondering what it meant. Again, in a gayer mood, she would stuff his mouth full of the clippings and make him chew them to a pulp, and then, when every letter was obliterated, she would bury the mass under the leaves. Once she had stuffed an old snake skin with it, and horrors! tied it about his neck, saying aloud: "*He* used to hold the same hands that wrote those words, around my throat, and pretend to be going to strangle me, so that he should not love me. He said I had bewitched him, and then he would cover every spot his fingers had touched with kisses—beautiful, soft, clinging kisses—Oh, Don, Don!" and

she threw her arms with a passionate cry of despair round his massive head, and cried as though her heart would break, until the intelligent fellow looked at her inquiringly with his great eyes, and then at the setting sun, as if to warn his mistress it was time to go home. And they went, leaving the distant forest leaves of nature hidden from sight, and suffocated by the contaminating breath of New York dailies.

Aimée had always had a profound disdain for ordinary men, and this gave to her face an original untamed look, and an expression of pride which accorded well with the poise of her splendid head, and this had won for her the sobriquet carved on the old school desk. She was a proud creature, you could tell by the corners of her mouth, but people were always surprised at her voice. She had acquired the languages easily, and this gave her voice a certain flexibility which was enhanced by natural bell-like tones, sweet and fresh, which touched the heart as delightfully as they did the ear. So that if you had asked this sorrowful wood nymph, slowly returning from the grove with her hand on the silver collar of the big brute, she would have told you that she could not remember ever having been refused anything for which she had asked.

Hanging her big hat on one of the gate posts,

a sort of elaborately carved sphinx, and tying its broad mull ties under the chin of the monster, she threw herself in the hammock farthest from the inner gate which led to the house. But someone was evidently watching for her, and soon a little picaninny ran down the terrace to her, and said that she was wanted on the dining-room piazza.

"Dunno who," he said briefly.

She took hold of his ear, and he of the dog's, and they walked toward the house. As they drew nearer, she saw a round headed little man talking with Mrs. St. Clair. They were waiting and glad to see her. The little fellow was one of those harmless creatures who have a provincial hatred for everything that obliges them to look higher than their own heads, so content and satisfied are they with themselves.

He rose to his feet, however, as soon as he saw the girl, much as if the groom of the chambers had suddenly announced "The Queen." It was a movement of spontaneous respect; her vanity was gratified, and she did, to the mother's surprise, sit down and talk to him. Mrs. St. Clair was weary of his talk, and left them alone. She did not think much about it, but supposed, of course, being the clerk of the old Mexican, he had come to tell Aimée about her inheritance—only a trifling sum—about two hundred dollars.

And so he had. But he also carried a box about eight inches square, and which he had wrapped carefully in soft paper, and then in a newspaper. First he looked cautiously over his shoulder and all around as if to be sure no one was near, and then gently gave it into her now trembling hands. Why was she so awfully excited by a mere little box left her by the old, swarthy cross-grained Mexican banker. What if it contained some of his stiff, wiry hair, or his false teeth with their gold plates, or those little thin hoops he had worn in his ears, or perhaps a whole ear, ring and all? "Ougo!" Such silly thoughts chased rapidly through her mind.

Señor Mellio had left the strictest orders and made the clerk swear never to deliver that box to anyone save "that girl called Aimée. She's a treasure, Nebo," he whispered for hours before he died, and not another word. This the little man told her, and more. He said Mellio's will could not be found. That it was not generally known, however, and everything went on as usual about the bank. And she smiled an uneasy smile when he told how his master had said so often to him in the most confident manner, "That girl is not lost, nor dead. She'll come back and find out all for herself. She's blooded. Now you mark my words, Nebo." He never became anxious about her in the least until he fell sick.

He spoke pathetically of the dead man, and with feeling, and though Aimée had not liked Mellio, but on the contrary had felt an innate revulsion toward him ever since she could remember, yet she almost wished she might have seen him again before he died. She liked his saying she was blooded. Somehow it meant much to her.

Soon as the strange little clerk left, she flew to her room and locked the door. Then she locked all the doors, even those of closets. Intuitively she knew that modest box with its exquisite Mexican carving held her future in its revelations. How glad she was the family were not interested. And she hugged the inanimate thing to her again and again.

But the key! He had given her no key. He said he had none. Quick as a flash she sprang to the writing desk and produced her keys on their ivory ring. Not one would fit. Then a thought occurred to her. That funny little old watch she had always kept in the corner of her jewel case. It never would keep time, and she remembered it had a tiny key hanging fastened to the long odd chain. They once told her that it had belonged to her grandmother, and she reverenced it on that account. As she lifted it from its bed of soft pink cotton, she became warm with excitement. Her grandmother. How could they know she ever had a grand-

mother? Who was she? What if the key should fit? She could not detach it, but the chain was long enough, and the lock yielded as if made specially for the strangely turned and twisted key. The lid fell back, and there on the purple velvet padding lay a roll of yellow paper tied with a flexible golden snake, the most slender, with the smallest, most diminutive head conceivable, and two diamond eyes, each no larger than the point of a pin. As she slipped it off, it seemed to nestle in her lap, and she read:

"You are a Montezuma; the daughter of a Hidalgo. Go to Mexico with the two hundred dollars I left for you, and *take this box.* Find Potosi Saltillo, paisano, and give him my will, which you will find under this. He will serve you. He is pledged to die for you." That was all.

How her head and heart beat. Now, at last! Now she understood why the little ring she had playfully slipped on the finger of her world renowned lover, and begged him afterward to keep for love's sake, then for remembrance's sake, the last time she had seen him, now she knew why it was so strangely cut. It had in it the very same figures that were in the heavy linen of the scroll, and in the padding of the box. It was an heirloom. How often had she sat by his side while they together discussed its probable

meaning. Distinctly she recalled his words when she gave it to him. "Aimée," he said, "you are a dear, sweet, pure angel; I wouldn't be surprised at anything from you, or to know that you were of royal blood." It was only said carelessly, but she had not forgotten anything.

Oh, if she only could! But now her mind would be diverted, and some day she would have someone write and tell him all. Then she fell a-thinking. Perhaps when he grew old—he was so much older than she—perhaps when he was sixty years old, and the winters became severe for him, and he was almost weary of living, and almost fancied people were tired of him, she should take such a beautiful ship, all crimson and comfortable, and with just the kind of big luxurious pillows and cushions and all the clean fragrance she knew he liked best, and should glide quietly into port, and steal him away with her—to her! Hers! Hers! And her heart swelled at the thought until it hurt her. How she would love him. She would make him young again, kissing his hair, and his curved, boyish lips. She would see that deep wave of color flush his cheeks and throat, and heighten the brilliancy of the charming eyes—eyes that had stolen her pure girl soul. The soul of a Montezuma! A Montezuma! and she repeated

it over and over. Was ever name so sweet? She would pretend it was his and give it to him on that phantom ship. She would never bear his name; that another had borne. Another whom she hated according as she had been injured in spirit by her; as her pride had been wounded. He would never want to leave her; never think of those left behind, nor of his past. Together they would begin life again. New life; royal life. No malicious tongue should censure a Montezuma. How all her people would love him. "How can I wait? How, How!" and she shuddered as she thought of being forty years old. Could she love him just that way for twenty long years and not see him? Would she not be a wrinkled, gray and toothless old woman by that time?

He is mine, and mine only, for I love him! No one could love him as I do. He loved me, too. He said I had entered his very soul, and usurped all else. How she reviewed all his dear little courtesies to her. The movements of spontaneous respect, full of that living eloquence which lies in gesture as well as speech ofttimes. She knew he had loved her deeply, and, yes—her heart, away in its depths, told her he still loved, and more ardently by absence. Why did that woman, his wife, ever read that fatal letter,

and why all the fearful tragedy which it tore her soul to review even in memory? Had Romera pursued the most honorable course? Why would that question come to her? What did she care for the past? Had she not a future now? Then her great love overwhelmed her again, and told her in a deafening din that she could not *wait* for him long, it would kill her. And she marveled that she had ever thought or dreamed of losing him. Should she?

"Never," and Aimée rose as she said it, and uttered this vow holding her rosary in one hand and the Montezuma serpent in the other:

"I will take him from her and his public career right in the prime of his life—right now. I will have him! he is mine! mine! If that past life has been illustrious, his future with me shall be doubly so. Where he has been contented because peaceful, he shall be contented and happy. Supremely happy." And she suddenly prayed, "Oh, Jesus, I pledge you he shall be happy and—good. Record my vow and keep it."

As she had prayed for hate, in the strength of her dismay, she now forgave and hoped. She did not only hope; she knew. He was hers. Pyrenean hounds and prison walls could not have thwarted such a love. A love that time and women had failed to turn to hatred. It was a

love sanctioned and saved by the good God. Do not disapprove it.

Who will solve the riddle of a young girl's heart?

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE LAND OF LOVE, MEXICO.

"Were you with these, my prince, you'd soon forget the pale, unripened beauties of the North."

—ADDISON.

Now that Aimée knew who she was, the love for Romera asserted itself with renewed vigor. Mrs. St. Clair had discovered one of the turquoise, dagger-like pins (which no one in the house used save Aimée) in the bundle some few weeks only before her return, and surmised all. She was sure then that the discovery had been the cause of her disappearance, and that she was indeed dead. She had loved the pretty child; at times equally as well as her own children, and was truly sorry she had been so impulsive, and not told them all about it. When she returned it had been, of course, to the family, as one from the grave, and they could not do enough for her.

At first the young songstress concluded not to tell them of her birth, the contents of the box, and her contemplated trip to Mexico; but she

knew she would never return, and at last changed her mind, and told the whole family as they sat on the broad piazza one warm evening. Aimée was in her old girlish position, lying on a heavy rug with her head on the big dog. She always contended he made the best of pillows. The moon was brilliant, and the shadows of the trees fell distinctly across the lawn, and those of the gently swaying foliage flickered to and fro on the fair young face turned full on the goddess of night in all the animation of the recital. It was a pretty picture, that finely chiselled face with its shock of curls in graceful disorder over the back of the great St. Bernard. That was what they all thought as they listened to the wonderful story of her public career. She first told them she was the famous Rose Fialge, and then led up to the contents of the box. The only thing she omitted was her love. That, none should ever know. Mr. St. Clair looked at her as she lay, and thought what a child she still was—in the twenties—could it be? Then he told her the story of their finding her. He and his wife had been traveling in Mexico, and had picked up a big, curious and elaborate basket containing herself, her wardrobe, and quite a sum of money. They could, in common humanity, scarcely do otherwise than take her with them and care for

her, which they did; took her with them to their home and into their family and hearts.

They had left the City of Mexico with its flat-roofed houses, wide doorways and strange gardens and fountains, had seen the towers of the Cathedral disappear long after those of the numerous other churches, and at last had watched the Castle of Chapultepec, gleaming white on its cliff above the cypress-trees, fade in the distance. Then they ascended the mountains and descended away on the other side, where the tile roofs gleamed in the sunlight, and on to the southward, where there were pretty gardens, orchards of cactus covered with ripe fruit and long groves of graceful pepper-trees. Here they found her under a low cactus covered with bright blossoms—a wee baby, and asleep.

"You did not awake until we got back to San Luis Potosi, to our stiff, big room at the hotel, and we started north with you that very day," Mr. St. Clair continued, in a musing voice. "Yes," he said, "you should go to Mexico," and Mrs. St. Clair, too, approved, adding: "When you are entirely well and strong."

And so she bade them farewell, and left. A few months later Mrs. St. Clair received a large check, and not knowing where to return it, nor to whom, she was compelled to keep it.

Aimée went direct to Mexico City. She had

no plan of action; she never had. How happy and free she felt as the train sped through the golden Savannah of the south, onward to Mexico, the land of her birth. She was no longer the Nameless, but—what if Potosi Saltillo should be dead, or she could not find him? she thought suddenly. Then, as quickly she banished all care, and abandoned herself to the greater self-respect which had sprung up within her. In the insidiously reposeful and balmy air of the Sunny South she slept much, even sitting in her chair, at times. She was so easy and at home in the tropics. Truly it is "God's own country," she said to herself. When the end of her railroad journey was reached, she gave orders to be driven direct to the home of the President of the Republic. She was acting in the most natural manner possible, for she was not bold nor forward, but it never occurred to her that his rank might perhaps demand form. As she approached the big house, the fact dawned upon her that he would not know her name; she was thinking of the neat "Aimée Arno" on her cards. "That will not do," she said, and quick as a flash she wrote "Rose Fialge" on a torn bit of tough blue parchment taken from her portmonnaie, and sent it to the Chief Magistrate of the country. He told her months afterward, that he had never received anything so strangely odd, nor half as

surprising. When she entered his presence he was surrounded by several distinguished looking men, and this is what they saw:

Aimée never looked as old as she really was, a fact perhaps due to the simple way in which the curls of her hair fell in nature's own fashion, and this day her dress, of some voluminous gauzy white material, made her look, to these wise statesmen, little more than a child. They had naturally supposed from the reputation of the singer, whose name had been written on the paper, that she was a woman of years—not a girl.

And as she stood, the color coming and going on her cheeks, the simple white frock, cut very low, exposing all the beautiful neck and exquisite shoulders, and but vainly concealing the smooth dimpled arms, she looked like some modest flower—not a woman with a world-wide reputation. Her light gray silk traveling ulster was on her arm, and she was as clean, and dainty, and fresh as if she had never been on a long journey.

The day was hot—very, very hot, shortly after twelve o'clock, when two-thirds of all the people in Mexico are indulging in their daily siesta. The sight of the young lady was like a refreshing breeze. She wore on her head a deep creamy hat of fine straw, with Gainsborough

curves, and trimmed with a great bow of the gauzy stuff which composed her dress, and the shaded ringlets beneath its front seemed to cling to and caress her smooth forehead. Her lips were scarlet, and the corners of her mouth very deep, and deepening as she stood, with head erect, before them. Then, as no one spoke, they curved into a smile and displayed all the even white teeth in a bewitching manner, as she said, in her mellow Southern voice, so well suited to the day and the hour, and, above all, the occasion, although she never dreamed the truth; namely, that they were severally doubting her identity as they looked her over:

"Shall I sing for you?"

Each man knew that this would be a splendid way to find out if it was really Rose Fialge, and so they all assured her they would be delighted.

The president, a handsome man, with true politeness, requested her to be seated, and was going to have an instrument brought in, but she told him she preferred standing just as she was. And with the utmost simplicity, as if he were not the greatest man of the Republic, she handed him her wrap, and the long thin gloves of softest kid, and he, great man as he was, held them while she sang.

She inclined her head slightly toward them, then raised it, the still white throat began to

pulsate, and such rare sweet notes as they had never heard floated through the luxurious apartment. It was an old Spanish air she had always loved, and these were the words:

"The waters of fair Guadalquiver
Lie still in the sheen of the night,
And the moonbeams are kissing the river,—
The porch of the palace is white;
The guitar, with its burden love-laden,
Responds at the troubadour's call
To the touch of the dusk Spanish maiden—
The jasmine hangs over the wall.

"The shadow is cool by the portal,
The roses hang blushing above;
The story is old and immortal,
The twain are alone with their love
'Merita, by starshine and river,—
Hidalgo, thou askest for all,
To-day and to-morrow forever,'—
The jasmine hangs over the wall.

"His words are the words of a lover—
The orange trees white in the dusk,
Drop shadow and blossom for cover—
He folds her as fruit in the husk,
With sighing and murmur are spoken
The vows that no fate may recall,
And the stillness of night is unbroken—
The jasmine hangs over the wall.

"Oh, lover and maiden, the roses
Are wet with the lips of the dew;
The song of the nightingale closes—
The rapture of loving is new,
But drinking the nectar of heaven,
Remember for aye and for all,
The heart that is given is given—
The jasmine hangs over the wall."

And as the last echoes of the silvery voice died away they were almost spell-bound with amazement. Then followed such a reception, and such words of genuine admiration as Aimée had never so appreciated as at that time. No one but Rose Fialge could sing like that!

The chief magistrate then made a sign for the others to withdraw, and personally conducting the charming and wonderful young songstress to a suite of handsome rooms, sat down by her side and Aimée told him her whole story—the strange story of her life from the time she could remember; the story as no one in the world knew it save—one, and the great heart of the great man opened for the confidence, and he told her that it afforded him extreme delight to assist her. She had not yet shown him the letter which she found in the box, and she drew it from her bosom and handed it to him. He glanced through it, and when he came to the name "Potosi Saltillo" he exclaimed: "You, a

Montezuma, daughter of a Hidalgo? Potosi Saltillo to die for you? It must be the same! Ah, my child," he said, "I welcome you, indeed. The death, as all think, of that child of Tito Careno and his Spanish American wife was the one dark blot in our country's honor of recent years. The darkest man who heard you sing was Potosi Saltillo, one of the noblest of the realm. A man who spent six years searching for the child, then purchased the magnificent estate adjoining my own, and settled down as one of our richest and most honored men. The castle and estate, he told me secretly, were bought for the girl, should she ever appear without a home." And all day long they talked, and the President of Mexico told her all about her parents and her birth—her fabulous wealth, and the beauty of her mother.

"Your name is Aimée Careno," he said. Those were the words most pleasant to the pink, alert ears of his hearer. Those were the words that sang themselves to her day and night. Those were the foundation upon which she built her hopes of the future. A name; and what a name! What a royal, noble, illustrious name! Could it be real? It meant everything to her. It meant Romera.

Great tears came into the kind eyes of this man as he saw her remarkable joy. He liked it. "She

has the true blood," he said to himself, for he realized that few people would care about such a trifle as birth, provided they had fame, beauty and riches. And when, with these thoughts in his mind, he turned toward the girl, she rose, glided toward him, and threw her beautiful firm arms round his neck and said: "I love Russell Romera; and as I love him, I love you, because you have made it possible for me to wed him. How can I thank you?" And she touched her velvety warm lips to his forehead. It sealed the eternal friendship of the two people who had never seen each other until a few hours before.

And then they sent for Potosi Saltillo, and all went to Aimée's home. Not the new one he had bought for her, but the luxurious home out in the country, several miles from the city, a spot wonderful in its mountain beauty and its flowers, from which she as a baby had been stolen, and where her brilliant young mother had died of grief, and her father only a few years later. Everything was as they left it. A dark brown old couple kept the place in an excellent condition, and to them Aimée used to go, asking questions by the score. They remembered all. And the old woman had once had a glimpse of the new baby "the day before you were stolen," she had added, impressively.

Such emotions as Aimée experienced are diffi-

cult to portray. Sometimes she spent hours by the magnificent tomb of her parents; once she had prayed that they might come back to her, uttering the prayer in the same blind faith with which in childhood she had prayed for the improbable. Again she would stand before the life-like portrait of her mother, making up conversations, and trying to imagine she was alive and speaking to her; or she would take a hand-mirror and trace the likeness of her own face to the one in the picture. The mouth, the deep eyes and the delicate complexion were identical, but the portrait was that of the purest type of blonde. The hair was like threads of pale gold, and wondrously abundant. It was done at the age of eighteen, and hung *en masse* all around the plump, bare shoulders and breast. She was laughing, was Aimée's mother, in this favorite picture, very much like Aimée laughed. She could scarcely think that such a happy being could have died of grief. That so light a heart should have met heaviest mourning.

Then she would take out of the grand padded closets the rare rich old dresses; "My Mamma's dresses," she would say to herself, touching them tenderly; and often she arrayed herself in them and in the laces and jewels worth a king's ransom, pleased to see they fitted her, and to fancy she was her mother. She even tried to live

through the loss of a baby girl, as her parents had done. Truly, a strange person. She loved to wander through this house; she liked to touch the silver and see the curious carving, and the crest and engraving, the very same that was in the ring she had given Romera. It was everywhere. On the silver, on some of the doors, on the linen, and on the old massive coach. For weeks she lived there, with the servants and two Spanish maids, and with Saltillo and her newly found friends as daily visitors. Saltillo insisted that she go to the city into the more modern palace he had built, and enjoy herself. He did not know that life for Aimée Careno held only one goal of happiness, and that she would never give up her pursuit of that.

She did, however, follow his wish, and lived like a princess. Her home became the court of what remained of nobility and aristocracy of her country, and she was the leader of society. Saltillo found that the will of the old Mexican, who had watched the basket which contained her babyship until he had seen it carefully found by the strange travelers, left a large fortune to her. With this she erected a small theatre, and sang to fashionable audiences for charity's sake.

Had she forgotten Romera? No; she was trying to! She was experimenting. But yet at night, and often in the midst of gayest festivities,

you might have observed a far away look in the deep eyes, and deeper still, could you have penetrated farther, an intense yearning and longing. Aimée Careno was struggling to love Russell Romera just as her royal father would have wished; and as her high-bred mother would approve. And the verdict of her study and thought seemed to be unanimously in favor of the heart. Yes, she must and would have Romera there with her.

*It was right.*

And she concluded to travel for a year. Saltillo did not know why. But perhaps the president of the republic could have told. To him Aimée Careno confided everything. How she had tried to overcome the love. How she had tried to hate. How she had utterly failed. And all, with that ideal frankness and candor with which she had related to him the story of her career to fame.

"Go to him, my child, and beg his forgiveness," he advised her. "Love is all this world contains."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AIMÉE'S FATHER.

"Noble by heritage,
Generous and free."

—CAREY.

The social conditions introduced into Mexico by the Spanish conquest were in every respect unique and picturesque. The conquerors represented the bravest and most romantic people of the sixteenth century. The Spaniards who came with Cortez and Grijalva, Pizarro and the rest, were generally as high born as they were reckless. The Spanish adventurers who penetrated our own country in the south and southwest were of like character. The Conquistadors who entered Mexico had the good fortune to fling themselves upon a civilized and not a barbarous race. The Aztecs have been delineated in their manners and customs by many writers. They were really a superior people, and not barbarians. By the standards of the sixteenth century we might define them as *élite*. In scientific attainments they were far ahead of the average Euro-

pean peoples in the corresponding epoch. As builders, not more than five races of all history had surpassed them. In pictorial representation they had made such progress as to astonish the Spaniards. In the cultivation of the soil they were adepts, and the arts of manufacture and commerce flourished among them. As to religious belief and practice, the world knows the story. Few things could be more degrading and horrible than the savage rites with which the worship of Huitzliopotchli was celebrated. Perhaps nothing more appalling has been done in the history of superstition than the human sacrifice done on the altar stone before the insatiable god of the Aztecs. He drank human blood as a dragon might drink a river. There, in the presence of the high sun, stands the priest, with the victim before him, bent backward on the stone. The victim is naked; his chest is heaved up by the attitude in which he is thrown by the attendants. The stone knife falls in one horrid gash across his breast, and the living heart is suddenly torn out and held up palpitating and dripping with blood in the face of heaven.

Let us not, however, condemn the Aztecs for their religion. The religion of one race always seems horrible to another, from which we may readily infer that in the light of reason, they are all horrible together. The Aztec religion was

simply pre-eminent of its kind. When it comes to human sacrifice, our horror, even to this day, is measured by our estimate of him who does it. On the whole, the Aztec race was greatly superior to the other peoples of the new world, and in many respects superior to their Spanish conquerors. Many of the latter found it so. In course of time, after the conquest, marriage unions began to be contracted between the Spanish officers, and the descendants of the noble families of the Aztecs. It was in this way that the exalted blood of the princely houses that had hitherto stood around the throne of the Montezumas began to be mingled in the currents of Mexican life. It is in evidence that the family of the last of the reigning monarchs was thus diffused and transmitted. The polygamous usage gave to Montezuma a multitude of offspring. At the time of his death he was still comparatively a young man, but his sons and daughters were many. Some of these were imprisoned or slain, but others were sought in marriage by the Spanish officers, and thus the foundations were laid of a new nobility in Mexico, which perpetuated itself with much honor and wealth to the present day.

In the army of Grijalva, was a young Spanish officer of noble birth, by the name of Miguel Careno. He was a native of Xeres in Spain, and

like other young adventurers of the age had gone abroad for glory. When a settled state of affairs supervened, he remained in Mexico, and by dint of adventure, and impelled by a romantic spirit, succeeded in ingratiating himself with the remnants of the royal family. One of the princesses of that family, whose husband had been slain in one of the Aztec insurrections, had a beautiful daughter, in whom the charms and virtues of her race had come to full blossom. In fifteen hundred and thirty six (1536), Miguel Careno, having acquired the Aztec tongue, and at the same time communicated his own Castilian to the Aztec girl, took her in marriage, by the irregular usages which necessarily prevailed in the existing confusion of races and institutions. There was thus established in Mexico, by the middle of the sixteenth century, the ancient and distinguished family of the Carenos. Miguel, the founder of this branch of the early Mexican nobility, had sold out his estates in Spain, and transferred his destiny wholly to the New World. He was a Hidalgo, and the conditions prevalent in Mexico gave full honor and recognition to his birth and rank. These were heightened to a great degree by his inter-marriage with the family of Montezuma. The Spanish blood was mingled with the most royal tide

of the Aztecs, and the family thus springing out of the ruins of the ancient order, represented all that was best and noblest in the century succeeding the conquest.

It is not needed to trace the vicissitudes through which the descendants of the Carenos passed down to the beginning of our own century. Ever and anon some member of the distinguished house appeared in the public history of his country. One of them was an officer of high rank, in the army of Santa Anna, and followed his leader on his campaign against the insurgent Texans. He fought in the battle of San Jacinto, and was wounded by a shot delivered by one of Houston's riflemen. A decade later, he took part with Arista, in the campaigns of that general on the Rio Grande, and was again under his old commander at Cerro Gordo, at Chapultepec, and Molino del Rey. His name was Perez Careno; his eldest son was named Tito Montezuma Careno. He was born in eighteen hundred and forty-three in the city of Mexico in the ancestral palace; and as a youth four years old clutching his mother's fingers saw the entrance of the American army into the Grand Plaza. In early life he was taken by his mother, the princess, to Spain, where he was educated at Seville and Alcantara. Such was

his precocity that his mind was already mature at twenty, and after a year's travel in Europe and the East, he returned to Cadiz, and thence to Mexico.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### AIMÉE'S MOTHER.

"She was a form of life and light
That seen, became a part of sight;
And rose, where'er I turned my eye,
The morning star of memory."

—BYRON.

At the age of seventeen the beautiful and accomplished Irene Burlingame was left an orphan. Her father had been a United States senator, and was minister to France at the time of her birth. After the expiration of his term, being possessor of a wondrous fortune, both by inheritance and by acquisition, he lived in Spain during the remainder of his life, as his wife was a delicate Spanish princess, and much attached to her native country.

Irene was a perfect Spaniard, save in appearance. She had all the fire and vehemence of passion attributed to that race, and a strong, unyielding will. But she was fair; fair even to delicacy. From childhood she had been the pet of her father's friends, and at his death, when his only child was to be left alone, he by his will appointed his bosom friend, Signa Dealry, the

former Spanish minister to the United States, to be her guardian.

Dealry had a black-eyed son; a splendid looking fellow about Irene's age, who fell in love with the pale-haired Spanish-American. That young lady rejected him, saying she could not love him, and in true Spanish fashion, he swore vengeance. Not that he was a villain, for that he was not, and was too well born ever to become such, but he vowed to himself that Irene Burlingame should never be happy until she reciprocated his affection—never, save through him. This was only a short time, a few weeks, after the death of her parents. Irene had never known aught but love and tender devotion, and grieved bitterly. But she was young, and youth will banish sorrow, and it soon became plain that her destiny was to fill the place socially in which her accomplished mother had shone. It was at one of the grand balls that her guardian, who knew not of his son's suit and rejection, introduced her to the young Mexican nobleman, Tito Careno. He was returning from his travels, and visiting Spain. His soft, fiery, black eyes won the heart of Irene Burlingame, and tormented as she was by Reggio Dealry, who still pressed his suit for her hand and heart, she became engaged to the handsome Careno the same night of their meeting. It was indeed a case of ardent love at

first sight. And it proved the strongest and most wonderful love. No one could see the two, the dark-haired Mexican and this lily-like girl without approving. And in one week from the night of the famous ball they were married in great state, at the magnificent Burlingame home; and all the friends, those of her mother and father, wished her long life and happiness. All was merry, and life seemed full of promise. Reggio Dealry was not there. Miss Burlingame, under the gentle, subduing influence of her newly-found love, had sent for him, but learned he had left Madrid, and so thought no more about it.

The young Carenos—the one, the only surviving representative of one of the best families in the United States, and the other, of the royalty of Mexico—left the Spanish capital for Careno's home—the home of his ancestors. Little did either dream that their every move was watched with an ever-growing jealousy—a fiend that was to assume monstrous proportions.

And they loved!

Tito and his beautiful bride were received as became royalty, and for a few months their lives were given up to entertainments and festivities in their honor. Then Careno took Irene to a small castle about five miles from the city of Mexico. Junopult it was called. And here, a year later,

their daughter, Aimée Burlingame Careno, was born. It was a beauteous spot at the foot of some magnificent mountains, in a region celebrated for its scenery ; the garden spot of Mexico. Careno had chosen this because he thought it would pleasantly remind Irene of her Spanish home. And they were so happy. The child was christened where kings had been crowned, in all the splendor and pomp of royalty. The noble Saltillo was publicly pledged to die for her, merely a form of showing his love for Careno. Although a republic, the people still loved the Carenos.

And what a wonderful baby it was! Aimée they chose for her name, Aimée Burlingame Careno, and the mother, so young, could scarcely believe her happiness. Months before, they had engaged a highly recommended Spanish nurse. She was a pleasant looking woman, and of excellent address, and, as she spoke well the mother's native tongue, her services had been employed.

But she was in league with Reggio Dealry, who was determined to wreak his vengeance by losing the child of Irene Burlingame Careno. Of course *he* would not do such a thing, but he would use others to make the mother suffer as she had made him suffer. He had lived near and had witnessed all the ideal happiness of her tropical life. He had even endured the pangs of seeing her—the woman he loved—adored so madly

—passionately, caressed by the dark, handsome Mexican. No wonder he was fired almost to murder. He didn't much care what became of the child, only so that *she* should lose it and suffer.

And his nefarious plans succeeded well. He had sent the nurse, and when Aimée was yet an infant of a few days or weeks, the unscrupulous creature had, according to instructions, placed her sleeping charge in her dainty basket. Then she had written the letter to disarm suspicion in case the child was found. Under the little form she had gathered together all the money and jewelry her babyship owned (principally heir-looms, as yet, which had been ceremoniously presented after the christening), some of the fine, exquisite clothing, and disappeared with the child forever.

At a little station late one night a dirty looking old Mexican took from a woman a basket—just an ordinary basket. The woman also gave him a check, which, could it have been seen, would have borne the name of Reggio Dealry, and which represented ten thousand dollars. The old man was to rid the country of the child "do away with her," had been his orders from the woman. He got off the train in a little while, for he feared the child might wake. Then he peered into the basket. His heart beat hard and fast.

This burly Mexican had never seen a beautiful, white, snowy, clean, innocent baby before, and he knew he could never leave her alone. One of the insurrections of human nature suddenly rose within him. So he placed the basket with its precious contents not very far from its regal home, right by the path, under cacti, on a road frequented by travelers. It was that season of the year, he well knew, when sight-seers from the United States were in all the little villages round about.

He had not long to wait; soon the young, happy-looking couple arrived, and he followed them as they took the waif with them. And he had always followed Aimée ever since. He journeyed with them that night to Alabama. The money he used to start a bank in the same town in whose suburbs the child was reared. He was as faithful as a dog, never losing sight of her for a moment. It was an attachment so strange as to be almost marvelous. It ruled him. When she had so suddenly disappeared, he had tried by every possible secret method to ascertain her whereabouts, but had failed. He felt, however, that she had gone to seek her own, and that it was right. He knew she was not dead. When he came to die, his only regret was that he had not seen her once more, and he left

her everything. The rest of the story is familiar. His name was Mellio.

* * * *

The young mother died of grief, believing, as all efforts to find a trace of the child, or even of the nurse, had proved fruitless, that her baby was dead. Careno also died a few years later.

The vessel upon which the nurse had sailed the day after the abduction was lost, and the wicked woman was drowned. Saltillo chose to regard his pledge as sacred, and for years, devoted himself to find even a trace of the child of his friend. But all to no purpose. The baby Aimée had disappeared as if by magic.

Reggio Dealry was in Spain. Neither of these pure-minded, grief-stricken parents had ever even thought of implicating him in their bereavement, and had so died without suspicion.

Ten years later Reggio began to long to know the fate of the child, what she had grown to be, and to hear of the parents. He felt at that time that he could almost forgive Irene Burlingame the crime of his having loved her, for he had won fame. He was the rising poet. His friends and those of his father, who was now dead, predicted yet greater things for him in the future, and such a prediction means much in this world.

He went to Mexico, and there really and earnestly repented his past. She was dead. Both

were dead. Irene Burlingame dead! that sparkling beauty, so full of life. He had never anticipated that. It could not be! And he almost went mad with remorse. For weeks he haunted the castle where she had died, and once won the old black servants to him by his interest and affability, and they had allowed him to look inside the walls. At her picture he had stood for some time, but the simple-hearted servants did not wonder at such an occurrence, but took it as a compliment to the great beauty of their dead mistress. And they told him, this pleasant stranger, that Saltillo gave instructions to keep everything just so, and they told him the whole story, as it was current in their country. With them he had echoed from his agitated heart the question, "What has become of the child?"

After these events he delved deeper into literature and study to drown thought, and he became a *real* poet; a poet of the heart; one who came as man to man. He sang, "his face to heaven, and the dew of duty on his brow." And he traveled much. He thought, perhaps, he might come across the old Mexican. Very vaguely only, for he had never seen this accomplice, and he knew the infamous nurse who had arranged all so cleverly, had been drowned. He was glad of that last fact, for the nurse *had loved him!*

Reggio had never loved again until in Paris he had met the famous singer, Rose Fialge. Years and years had passed. He was forty-five years old, and his fame had surpassed the expectations and prophecies of his warmest friends. He told Rose Fialge he loved her, but she had been indifferent, and was so young that he had thought to let it rest, and not pain her by the mention of it again. And he did not. But when he met her that time, so unexpectedly, at the watering-place, and had caught a glimpse of her real soul as she raised her eyes from her dreaming, filled to the brim with passionate love —when he saw the capabilities of her emotion, the poet knew he loved her, and he knew that it was vainly—he knew that look was for the object of the deep, oblivious reverie from which he had roused her. And he felt a desire to give her his confidence—tell her of his long-ago-love, loss, revenge and remorse, and ask her sympathy in exchange.

But he lost track of her again, and lived on in the miserable publicity of his solitude and memories, in the great city of New York.

Reggio Dealry had never intended to cause the death of any person, or even to cause eternal sorrow. In fact, he did not know at the time of the marriage of Irene Burlingame just what he did want, save to make her suffer. It is strange

how in some good natures—natures of splendid outlines, the idea of revenge often asserts itself. It is the paramount aim when love is turning to hatred. Occasionally, especially in fiction, a lover sacrifices himself for the happiness of the beloved, as did Darnay in Dickens' "Tale of Two Cities," but more frequently in life, yes, in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, vengeance is the only thing to appease the disappointed heart. And the strangest thing about it is that, in life, the perpetrator may afterward be a man again of estimable character and still even more admirable in the eyes of the world, than before he was ruled by this basest of tyrants. Dealry thought to make the beautiful Miss Burlingame, now Careno, suffer as he had; his plan—if such an indefinite scheme, left almost entirely to the Spanish nurse who loved him, and obeyed his every wish, might be called a plan—was to restore the child after a year or so—perhaps after a week or two. He did not know that the creature had banished the child forever, for she had been drowned on her way to him. The story related to him by the old servants at the castle was a revelation indeed, and the hopelessness of his remorse was terrible. He had noticed the peculiar coat of arms in the hall of the castle at the time. This it was which ultimately led to his revelation to Aimée or Rose Fialge.

This coat of arms represented an armed Venus, and bore this inscription below the beautiful figure, "VIVAS," mayest thou live. The incongruity of the Roman inscription had impressed him. The facts were that the strange symbol belonged at first exclusively to the Montezuma princesses who were most vain, and exceedingly handsome. One, generations before, perhaps by tradition the vainest, was marvelously beautiful. Her figure was perfect in its proportions, and her lover and husband was said to have originated the design, adding the classic inscription as a plea or wish that the beauty of the family might be preserved forever. The princess had died very young, and it had come to be the coat of arms for the family. The men wore it in a ring remarkably formed. It had the appearance of three rings united, broadened in the front, and tapering within the hand. Upon the wide part of each were two letters, the whole forming the Latin word. The figure they wore engraved on the inside of the ring. Such a ring might have been seen on the hand of Saltillo at that time. Tito Careno had given his friend this ring at his death. It had also been the signet ring of Tito's father.

There were formerly two of the rich heirlooms in existence, but one had been ceremoniously presented to the baby heiress, Aimée, and

had disappeared with her abduction. The very ring which, almost twenty years after that event, Aimée Arno had given to Russell Romera with her undying love. She had slipped it upon the smallest finger of his left hand, laughing as she told him that all rings were emblems of eternity, and as she also related to him one of her favorite Spanish legends of how that special finger had in it a nerve which led directly to the heart, and which pulsated with each heart throb.

This ring was very elaborate and its workmanship intricate. It was composed of iron, bronze, silver and gold, beautifully welded and made to form a strap with buckles, precisely, in shape, like a common belt or collar. It could be straightened out like an ordinary leather strap, and was formed of small pieces of the metals kept so delicately together that the lines of the meeting were scarcely perceptible. This was accomplished by having many minute and unseen hinges, which made the whole pliable and allowed it to be buckled on the finger. The gold in the ring, surrounded by the iron, composed the armed Venus, the figure being uniquely and clearly relieved by the darker metal. The letter V in the middle of the word "Vivas," mayest thou live, was in bronze, and the VI and AS on either side of it were in silver,

near the fastening. The buckle was engraved with an elaborate and almost infinitesimal double monogram of three M's, because of its having been worn during three centuries by the royal family of the Montezumas.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### REVELATION.

"I hold him great, who, for Love's sake,
Can give, with generous, earnest will,—
Yet he who takes for Love's sweet sake,
I think I hold more generous still."

—PROCTOR.

While Dealry, the most famous poet of the day, was living in New York, he met at his club, the famous Manhattan of that city, the great Russell Romera, and they became, oddly enough, for neither was given to strong attachments among men, warm friends. Dealry had spoken in terms of the most respectful admiration of Rose Fialge; Romera had accidentally overheard him, and that was the beginning of the friendship.

They were dining late one evening at Delmonico's when the conversation turned to personal adornment, and finger rings. Dealry took off the ring he wore to show Romera its enamel lining. It was a handsome and valuable ring set with twenty diamonds, very, very old, and said to have been the historical ring given by James I.

to Thomas Sackville, Duke of Dorset, who was Lord High Treasurer in the time of Elizabeth. The Duke of Dorset had given it to William Haddon, the famous scholar, and he, in turn, had given it to Dealry's ancestor, who was his warmest friend, upon his leaving England for Spain. So it had come to Reggio.

Romera then told, for the first time since that memorable occasion when he had won the love of the young Aimée Arno, not Rose Fialge then, the story of his changed name; and the fact that their ancestors had been trusted friends, strengthened their own friendship.

Then Dealry's eyes fell on the curious ring upon the shapely hand of Romera, and he asked to examine it. The latter could not remove it he said, but he allowed him to look at it closely where it was.

"Has it a story in connection?" Dealry asked, and at that moment he caught the inscription "V I V A S," the same as that in the Mexican castle. There, too, was the splendid Venus. What could it mean?

And he related to Romera all the tale of his miserable jealousy, revenge and crime. He was growing excited when Romera answered the question his friend had propounded before the recital—

"Yes, my ring has a story, a beautiful and

sad story, and,"—then he paused an instant—"Dealry," he continued, "I'm going to finish the story of my life to you, as I have never yet to anyone." And he related all his love—the first of his life—love for Rose Fialge who had been Aimée Arno; he did not tell Aimée's story just then, but said that since she had gone to Mexico, he had almost despaired of ever again seeing her.

And now, at last, Dealry saw his way to redeem his sin, and win the dead mother's pardon, if such a thing were possible. He could and would pave the way to happiness for the child, by sacrificing his love. They both knew now that Rose Fialge was Aimée Careno, and understood all. They spent the entire night walking and talking. Romera recalled, and told his friend little things in the life of Aimée Arno, as she had in such a simple manner called herself, and little by little, her whole history, as far as she had known it when they met and loved.

And the two friends, so strangely bound in their friendship, went to the home of the Montezumas. The one to absolve his sin, confess his crime, to implore the child's pardon, and atone for it; the other to seek his love and peace.

Ah! Aimée Careno, ever impulsive Aimée, you need not have left your tropical home, for the chilly, cold north! Your lover is coming!

Romera comes to you! Both of your hearts have been simultaneously swayed by the same impulse to be near each other, as you must be forever. He seeks you to give up all for you, as men should for love; to be yours before the whole world and all heaven, and the angels are smiling. Don't you hear their whispers through the balmy skies, and in the quivering trees, and in the carolling of the gay birds around you, all bidding you stay—stay and wait? Your heart, too, is throbbing his name. Romera, Romera, if you only knew! If you could only hear and be patient.

Romera was human—*naturally* human. All men to be great must be so. He was a man; a man of the people, acknowledged among the leaders of the greatest nation in the world. He had thought to himself over and over that no man of human instincts could have helped loving Aimée; and the eyes of Rose Fialge were famous in several continents. And he recalled their happiness when she was Aimée Arno; the night he first met her. She was sweet and refreshing as the sunshine. Her youth, refinement and beauty had won him. And the dear thing had admired him, and love went from heart to heart. She gave him all without reserve. He gave her all that was his to give, and time could never efface her imprint from his

heart. It was a part of his life; no fickle fancy. *Men* at forty do not have *fancies.* He had tried to forget, but all of life and eternity combined are not years enough to blot out such a love. The first that God willed and guided. There are not many such in life, and it is not well to thwart the will of Heaven.

And when he found she had left Mexico to travel he felt again the feverish pangs of regret and feared the past could not be undone, yet his love daily increased as he heard her praises. He lingered. It was a comfort to be where she had been only such a little while before. And he made friends with Saltillo and with all of Aimée's friends, just to listen to them and learn of her acts. The president of the republic, and her best friend and confidant, had gone on a long voyage for his health, or Romera might have been assured of some things, and Aimée, perhaps, might have been recalled. Saltillo insisted upon the two men spending some months at his country seat, and it was ultimately so arranged, and Romera informed his financial agents in the north. He was not divorced from his wife. He had been at home very little since the sudden unhappy and wretchedly foolish, as he called it, sacrifice of his love, a vital part, *to what?* Was it his financial honor, or the malice of a cold, calculating woman? Now that woman was going

abroad, she had written him. She spent several months abroad each year, and before she went she engaged a young, talented governess to care for, and principally to amuse and instruct Romera's two children, and to go with them and their elderly nurse to the mountains of Virginia to spend the summer; nor could the little darlings have been left in better hands.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### BESSIE EARL.

"There has fallen a splendid tear
From the passion-flower at the gate,
She is coming, my dove, my dear;
She is coming, my life, my fate."

—TENNYSON.

The governess Mrs. Romera had engaged was no other than Aimée, but few would have recognized the famous Rose Fialge in this black-haired, modest Bessie Earl. The woman did not. The dark hair brought out most clearly all the tints of her exquisite complexion, changing the style of her beauty, but not marring it. She wore peasant-like dresses, and rather implied without exactly saying, for she knew she did not look it, that she was German. She thought this would please the woman, who was herself German by descent.

How Aimée felt all her contempt for her spring up anew, and how glad she was when she sailed. Aimée left with the children and their elderly guardian for the beautiful moun-

tains. She could never have done it save in the hope of being near Romera and occasionally seeing him, and how her heart sank when the little Dolly, her father's pride, cried for "Papa" because of a splinter in her tiny hand, and as Aimée tenderly removed it and kissed the spot to "make it well," the child had said, "I love you better than Mamma, next to Papa, 'cause you're good and beautiful, and if Papa don't come back to his baby from Mexico, Dolly'll love you best." And she threw her plump little arms around Aimée's neck and pressed her rosy, baby face, so like Romera's, to Aimée's soft cheek caressingly.

The weeks had flown rapidly, and it was early November when this happened, and Aimée first learned where her lover really was.

The weather was gloomy and very cold. They were to leave for the city soon—in a few days. The next day about noon, Aimée took the children for their last drive over the mountains.

The air was brisk, and the horses she was driving tandem were on their mettle. She enjoyed it, and they were all in their element, and the children were joyously happy; Aimée, too, was nearly happy.

Suddenly Dolly screamed, "Oh, look!" And close behind them came at a fearful speed a great, overgrown, vicious horse. Rearing and

plunging it came, a snake probing its fangs into his sensitive flesh as it tightened itself around his foreleg. The noise the furiously pained animal made was terrible.

They were driving down the long, steep, beautiful, winding mountain road from the "bear's den," just above a little village called Snickersville, in one of the most picturesque spots of Virginia. The road was very steep, and the horses took fright. Aimée tightened the reins, and, as she saw the flesh of the thorough-bred creatures she was driving quiver with excitement as they caught sight of the strange, maddened animal, compressed her lips tightly, but the horses ran. Wildly, all abandoned, they plunged and tore down the mountain side, careening and rocking the slight cart, then swaying it to and fro like a toy. It seemed ages to Aimée, and all she thought of was to save the children—Romera's children.

Then, horror of horrors! the lines broke. Quick as a flash she told Dolly to hold tight to the seat, and taking the boy, an agile, bright child, considerably older, to the back of the cart, she, by an almost superhuman strength, broke down the back, and where the road was sandy, as it was in many places, she slid the child, or rather let go of the board on which she had hastily placed him, and—thank heaven! in

an instant, as they sped on and on, she saw him get up unhurt, and brush the sand from his velvet trousers. And she called loudly to him to follow them. Then she clasped Dolly. They were nearing a precipice, and at its foot a branch of the Shenandoah River gleamed in the frosty sunlight. Dolly, in child-like ignorance of their danger, said, pantingly, as its beauty struck her baby fancy, as she could scarcely get her breath, so fast were they going, "The fairies, the fairies are down there, making silver dwesses." And Aimée kissed her and wrapped the big, heavy robe about her, and, clasping her yet closer to her, vowed to save *his* baby. At that instant the cart struck a great projecting rock, and Aimée experienced a hot sensation, felt a tiny hand, and heard a muffled baby voice laughing as if delighted at the frolic, and then all was chaos.

The same farmer who caught the snake-bitten horse, captured the other beautiful animals, and knew at once to whom they belonged. The handsome governess and the pretty children were known all over the region, and the fine city horses almost equally well.

They found both children crying over Aimée, and trying to wake her. They carried them all home, the ignorant country doctor pronounced the girl dead; and in the excitement of the

*melée*, the following telegram was sent to Romera:

"Governess killed in runaway. Saved both children. Come at once if possible," and signed by the only governess he had heard of. There must be two. Anyhow, it was his duty to go, and he started North at once with all speed. Had some one really given her life for his children? And he dwelt lovingly on the greeting Dolly was sure to give him. It would be good to feel again the rosy baby fingers round his neck. And he thanked God that she had not been hurt. Very, very impatient, too, was one distinguished looking man on a certain train the day it stopped at the little country station, and in a few minutes that same personage clasped his two darlings to him, and with grateful tears in his fine eyes kissed their childish faces. And they led him away to the hotel to find their pretty governess; trying each to out-vie the other in chatting her praises, and telling how beautifully she sang to them. And Romera became interested, wondered who she was, and admired her courage, while he blessed her with every breath for saving his darlings, and that her own life had been spared; that the message was false.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### CONCLUSION.

"Oh! sad are they who know not love,
But far from passion's tears and smiles,
Drift down a moonless sea, and pass
The silver coasts of fairy isles.

"But clear as amber, sweet as musk,
Is life to those whose lives unite;
They walk in Allah's smile by day,
And nestle in his heart by night."

—T. B. ALDRICH.

Rose Fialge, for as such she had been recognized when the nurse removed the heavy black hair, was not killed, nor even hurt. She was merely stunned, and her wrist slightly sprained.

Far from being pleased at the discovery of her identity, she decided to leave at once. It was hard to part from the children, who clung to and loved her as only the innocent can one who has loved them long, and tenderly cared for them in danger. Aimée would rather have told them the facts herself. It would have been more open, and she would not have had these unpleasant feelings. True, they the country folk,

respected her far more as the world-known singer, than they had as Bessie Earl, the nurse, but she wanted to get away from it all. No one had told her of the telegram, and she told no one she was going. And as she stood in the big reception-room of the hotel, a cold, dreary looking place now as winter approached, her tall figure clad in fur, waiting for the train, her thoughts reverted to Romera, and the beautiful eyes filled with tears. Perhaps never in her life had she felt more lonesome; more completely alone; never when plain Aimée Arno working diligently at her opera. Then she had Rachael; and later love—hopeful love. Now, although she was known to fame, and a royal heiress to the largest fortune in Mexico, and, above all, possessed a name, Burlingame Careno, she was less happy. Her love had grown to such proportions, and seemed at times so hopeless.

That Rose Fialge was the last of the royal family of Mexico had not as yet become known in the United States. She had endeavored to prevent it, but some time, a few days only before the runaway, it had leaked into the New York dailies.

She had given up the Drydens, for she felt unworthy of them, but somehow, as she looked abstractedly into the dull gray sky made irridescent by the swimming eyes, and desolate

thoughts of Romera, lost to her it seemed, she longed to be caressed by the motherly, warm-hearted woman, and to hear the Senator's cordial, cheery voice. She knew by the papers that they were living at the Plaza. She would go to them, she suddenly concluded, and take them with her to her warm sunny home. Her home! How sweet that sounded to her world-weary ears. She would tell them all—even her love, and they would forgive her now—that had been so long ago, three years, almost, and she had been so young. In attending to their pleasures she would try to forget Romera. Perhaps she would see him. He was in Mexico, and might go to her home, out of curiosity if nothing else, and she fell to wondering if he would know her, and as she surveyed herself in the long mirror, the carriage that was to take her to the dépôt was announced. Then she sought the matron, left something for the servants, and kissed the aged nurse of the children good-bye, bidding her take good care of the "little dears," "and tell them good-bye for me," she added with shining eyes, and was gone. She was going to New York to join her friends.

Five minutes later Romera entered that very room with the laughing children in his arms, and was told all. Rose Fialge! His Aimée! And he had just missed her! And she was the noble

one who had saved the lives of his children, careless of her own. And not pausing to explain, he rushed off to the station and sprang aboard the train, ticketless and excited, just as it pulled out for New York. Through the long train of cars he walked several times, but could not find her. Once he caught a glimpse of a neat English shoe peeping from a seal garment, but like a flash; and the door of the state-room was closed again. It was but a little thing, but it set his heart beating; he felt it was Aimée; and as he thought it over in the long night, as he vainly tried to sleep, he *knew* it was his love.

And Rose Fialge, her face flushed and her body and soul restless, tossed uneasily on her pillows that night not six inches from the head of silky hair which she loved, and which belonged to Russell Romera.

Strangely enough at that time, unknown to each other until long after, both were thinking of the lines:

"Come to me, dearest, I'm lonely without thee,
Day time and night time I'm thinking about thee,
Come, for my heart in your absence is weary,
Haste, for my spirit is sickened and dreary;
Come to the arms which alone should caress thee,
Come to the heart that is throbbing to press thee."

It was a strange coincidence, typical of the

wonderful harmony existing between their two souls.

They would arrive in New York in the night, and Romera left word to be called at seven. Aimée slept late, and so it was that he arrived at the hotel while she was still in slumber. Dealry, too, was in New York now and at the Plaza, so thither Romera had gone. He thought, too, that Aimée would go there. Nine o'clock came, and ten, and he grew restless and impatient. These words were ringing in his ears:

"The fountains mingle with the river,
And the river with the ocean,
The winds of heaven mix forever
With a sweet emotion.
Nothing in the world is single;
All things by a law divine
In one another's being mingle;
Why not I with thine?"

Back and again they returned to his mind, these beautiful thoughts of Shelley, and he longed to see Aimée Arno. It was cold.

As he stood with Dealry in the ladies' reception hall, the latter urging him to go to the club (he had told Dealry all), and threw off his nervous strain, a carriage drove up. The men saw the shimmer of such hair as could belong to but one person in the universe, and Aimée

Carcno stood before them in the uncertain electric light. She was enveloped in a rich seal cloak, and wore thick dark furs. A stylish and dainty toque of seal, with two tiny mink heads for ornaments, surmounted the fine head and accentuated the rare beauty of her face, brilliant from the frosty air.

Romera stepped eagerly toward the handsome young woman and pressed both the gloved hands warmly in his, looking deep into her eyes in his old intense way, and in that brief moment they obliterated and forgot all the bitter past. They were again the Aimée Arno and Russell Romera who had once sung together, "But one heart's enough for a body, so pray give me yours in return." She found again the man of greatness, the real Romera, and he the sweet Aimée who had *admired him.* And they knew that life still held supreme happiness for them.

"And Mr. Dealry, too?" she said, extending her hand. "I'm glad to see you, my friend," and her peculiar accent had never sounded so charming as at that moment. Why, she was the image of Irene Burlingame; just as he had last seen her years and years ago. Could it be he had not observed it before? The same unfathomable, cerulean eyes mingled so strangely with duskiness, and the same maddening lips with

their deep curves, and sometimes tender, sometimes haughty smile.

Then she told Romera that the Drydens were in the hotel and he took her to them. Two hours later he called and they together told them all.

Romera had some correspondence with the woman who bore his name, and a quiet separation was obtained; the woman stipulating only that he should keep the children, and fix a large amount of money on her. They sent at once for the children and went, the Drydens and the happy family to be, to the sunny land of love.

Before they left, however, Dealry told the story of his wicked sin to the young lady. Romera was by her side, and heard all. As the poet went on and on through the labyrinth of the story, he noticed the wonderful and varying expressions on her fair face. He saw a tender light diffuse itself in the Spanish eyes as he spoke in glowing praise of her mother, and told his love for her; love which had caused his sin. He observed the pride in the mobile mouth as he spoke of the genius of her ancestors; of Burlingame, her grandfather, and of his wife, the princess.

As Dealry concluded the long tale, then it was he saw the venomous flash of intense hate, keen as a dagger, unforgiving and reckless, gleam

from her eyes, and a crimson spot burn on either cheek. After all, this man had murdered her mother, her *mother*, and in all the fire of the vengeful blood within her, she rose, her voice like a deep resonant bell, and said, her fierce eyes fixed on him: "God may forgive you, I never can." That was all; but it was much. And she glided from them.

When Romera went to her an hour later, he found her on Mrs. Dryden's couch sleeping. Every now and then her bosom heaved with a dry, heart-rending sob, as they bent over and watched her. Mrs. Dryden said she had told her all, and she had not advised her to forgive him, as she knew her nature well enough to be assured she would some time. And she did.

Romera was sitting alone by her when she suddenly opened her eyes. She always woke so. Wide awake in an instant.

"My own darling," she said, in her dulcet, clear, natural voice, "I am so sorry about Dealry. Do you think he will forgive me? I have just dreamed that Mamma Burlingame was here and pleaded with me to forgive," and her eyes were filled with a tender spiritual light of the ethereal regions around us.

"My love, my impulsive Aimée," Romera said, his hot lips passionately meeting hers, so

dewy cool, "my angel! The dearest thing on earth!"

* * * * *

They were married where she had been christened, with a splendor befitting the Montezuma princess.

* * * * *

What, then, does it all signify? What does it imply, that Aimée followed and sought Romera, and that he sought her and took her? It is explicable only on one ground. People say that they loved each other, but what is that? After all, what is it to love and to be loved? It is this: There is such a thing as a concord of spirits, and a discord of spirits. There is such a thing as a harmony of souls. A soul knows when it chords with another, but it does no more than recognize. Love is not of contrivance and adjustment, but a recognition and a satisfaction. Between a man soul and a woman soul, there is sometimes an exquisite harmony. Each knows the other because of the sweet chord that is struck in the desolation of the world. That chord once heard will never be forgotten. The music of it will echo through the spheres. True, the chord may be broken and lost, as it *is* broken and lost a thousand times, but the recognition

of soul by soul has occurred, and that is love and may be peace.

Down under all this is something else. Nature has provided the concord independently of the wills of men; only she, and not another. But what for? What does nature *mean* in contriving the antecedents of love in the world? She means a tender care for the human race. She means the coming of something better and more beautiful. She means the child that is to be. She means the child to be born under conditions that shall make him poet, artist, orator, statesman. As yet, none of these have been. Many have borne the name of poet, of artist; but they have been so only in part. The poesy and art of the world have thus far been poor and fragmentary. The real poet and the real artist are to be born—born of natural and beautiful conditions, out of which the new poesy will spring as a blossom and the new art flourish as a tree. Whatever is beautiful in human life is born of love; the rest is discord and dismay.

To-day we are in the dawn of a life to come. Men now live, and women, who are fit to survive, *mated by the law of love*. There are a few worthy to be the progenitors of the coming glory. There are rare spirits here and there in this day-dawn of a new era, who, flying together in mid-air, are fit to live in the eternities, as the

first who have really loved, and have transmitted themselves, in the wildness and splendor of love and passion, to the new spirits that are to arise like winged creatures from the harmonious and perfect embrace of their souls.

"Love is enough. Why should we ask for more?
What greater gift have gods vouchsafed to man?
What better born of all their precious store,
Than our fond hearts that love and love again?"

THE END.

## JULIE P. SMITH'S NOVELS.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Widow Goldsmith's Daughter | $1 50 | The Widower | $1 50 |
| Ebrig and Otho | 1 50 | The Married Belle | 1 50 |
| Ten Old Maids | 1 50 | Courting and Farming | 50 |
| Lucy | 1 50 | Kiss and be Friends | 50 |
| His Young Wife | 1 50 | Blossom Bud | 1 50 |

## JOHN ESTEN COOKE'S NOVELS.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Surry of Eagle's Nest | $2 00 | Out of the Foam | $1 50 |
| Fairfax | 1 50 | Hammer and Rapier | 1 50 |
| Hilt to Hilt | 1 50 | Mohun | 1 50 |

## CELIA E. GARDNER'S NOVELS.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stolen Waters. (In verse) | $1 50 | Rich Medway | $1 50 |
| Broken Dreams. Do. | 1 50 | A Woman's Wiles | 1 50 |
| Compensation. Do. | 1 50 | Terrace Roses | 1 50 |
| A Twisted Skein. Do. | 1 50 | Seraph—or Mortal? (New) | 1 50 |
| Tested | 1 50 | | |

## A. S. ROE'S NOVELS.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| True to the Last | $1 50 | To Love and To Be Loved | $1 50 |
| A Long Look Ahead | 1 50 | Time and Tide | 1 50 |
| The Star and the Cloud | 1 50 | Woman Our Angel | 1 50 |
| I've Been Thinking | 1 50 | Looking Around | 1 50 |
| How could He Help It | 1 50 | The Cloud on the Heart | 1 50 |
| Like and Unlike | 1 50 | Resolution | 1 50 |

## CAPTAIN MAYNE REID'S WORKS.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Scalp Hunters | $1 50 | The White Chief | $1 50 |
| The Rifle Rangers | 1 50 | The Tiger Hunter | 1 50 |
| The War Trail | 1 50 | The Hunter's Feast | 1 50 |
| The Wood Rangers | 1 50 | Wild Life | 1 50 |
| The Wild Huntress | 1 50 | Osceola, the Seminole | 1 50 |
| The Maroon | 1 50 | The Quadroon | 1 50 |
| The Headless Horseman | 1 50 | The White Gauntlet | 1 50 |
| The Rangers and Regulators | 1 50 | Lost Leonore | 1 50 |

## POPULAR HAND-BOOKS.

| | |
|---|---|
| The Habits of Good Society—The nice points of taste and good manners | $1 00 |
| The Art of Conversation—For those who wish to be agreeable talkers | 1 00 |
| The Arts of Writing, Reading and Speaking—For Self-Improvement | 1 00 |
| Carleton's Hand-Book of Popular Quotations | 1 50 |
| 1000 Legal Don'ts—By Ingersoll Lockwood | 75 |
| 600 Medical Don'ts—By Ferd. C. Valentine, M.D | 75 |
| On the Chafing Dish—By Harriet P. Bailey | 50 |
| Pole on Whist | 1 00 |
| Draw Poker without a Master | 50 |

## POPULAR NOVELS, COMIC BOOKS, ETC.

| | |
|---|---|
| Les Miserables—Translated from the French. The only complete edition | $1 50 |
| Stephen Lawrence—By Annie Edwardes | 1 50 |
| Susan Fielding Do. Do. | 1 50 |
| A Woman of Fashion Do. Do. | 1 50 |
| Archie Lovell Do. Do. | 1 50 |
| Love [L'Amour]—English Translation from Michelet's famous French work | 1 50 |
| Woman [La Femme]—The Sequel to "L'Amour." Do. Do. | 1 50 |
| Verdant Green—A racy English college story. With 200 comic illustrations | 1 50 |
| Doctor Antonio—By Ruffini | 1 50 |
| Beatrice Cenci—From the Italian | 1 50 |
| Josh Billings. His Complete Writings—With Biography, Steel Portrait, and 100 Ill. | $2 00 |
| Artemas Ward. Complete Comic Writings—With Biography, Portrait, and 50 Ill. | $1 50 |
| Children's Fairy Geography—With hundreds of beautiful Illustrations | 1 00 |

---

**All the books on this list are handsomely printed and bound in cloth, sold everywhere, and by mail, postage free, on receipt of price by**

G. W. DILLINGHAM, PUBLISHER,
33 West 23d Street, New York.

## Humorous Works and Novels in Paper Covers.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| A Naughty Girl's Diary | $ 50 | The Wages of Sin | $ 50 |
| A Good Boy's Diary | 50 | The Evil that Women Do | 50 |
| It's a Way Love Has | 25 | Mrs. Spriggins—Widow Bedott | 50 |
| Mizora—Zarowitch | 50 | Phemie Frost—Ann S. Stephens. | 1 50 |
| Zamilla—By Beulah | 50 | A Marriage Below Zero—A. Dale | 50 |
| The Devil and I | 50 | An Eerie He and She. Do. | 50 |
| Florine | 50 | An Old Maid Kindled. Do. | 50 |
| Smart Sayings of Children—Paul | 1 00 | A Society Star—Chandos Fulton. | 50 |
| Crazy History of the U. S | 50 | Our Artist in Spain, etc.—Carleton | 1 00 |
| Rocks and Shoals—Swisher | 50 | Draw Poker without a Master. | 25 |

## Miscellaneous Works.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dawn to Noon—By Violet Fane | $1 50 | Dan, The Detective—Alger | $1 25 |
| Constance's Fate. Do. | 1 50 | Death Blow to Spiritualism | 50 |
| Inside the Church of Rome | 1 75 | The Sale of Mrs. Adral—Costello. | 50 |
| Lion Jack—By P. T. Barnum | 1 50 | The New Adam and Eve—Todd. | 50 |
| Jack in the Jungle. Do. | 1 50 | Phillip St. Clare—Appleton | 50 |
| Dick Broadhead. Do. | 1 50 | The Mystery of Central Park—Bly | 50 |
| Red Birds Christmas Story, Holmes | 1 00 | Debatable Land—R. Dale Owen. | 2 00 |
| The Life of Sarah Bernhardt | 25 | Threading My Way. Do. | 1 50 |
| Arctic Travels—By Dr. Hayes | 1 50 | Princess Nourmahal—Geo. Sand. | 1 50 |
| Flashes from "Ouida." | 1 25 | Galgano's Wooing—Stebbins | 1 25 |
| The Story of a Day in London. | 25 | Stories about Doctors—Jeffreson | 1 50 |
| Lone Ranch—By Mayne Reid | 1 50 | Stories about Lawyers. Do. | 1 50 |
| The Train Boy—Horatio Alger | 1 25 | | |

## Miscellaneous Novels.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Doctor Antonio—By Ruffini | $1 50 | Warwick—M. T. Walworth | 2 50 |
| Beatrice Cenci—From the Italian. | 1 50 | Hotspur. Do. | 1 50 |
| The Story of Mary. | 1 50 | Lulu. Do. | 1 50 |
| Madame—By Frank Lee Benedict | 1 50 | Stormcliff. Do. | 1 50 |
| A Late Remorse. Do. | 1 50 | Delaplaine. Do. | 1 50 |
| Hammer and Anvil. Do. | 1 50 | Beverly. Do. | 1 50 |
| Her Friend Laurence. Do. | 1 50 | Zahara. Do. | 1 50 |
| Mignonnette—By Sangrée | 1 00 | Led Astray—By Octave Feuillet | 50 |
| Jessica—By Mrs. W. H. White | 1 50 | The Darling of an Empire | 1 50 |
| Women of To-day. Do. | 1 50 | Clip Her Wing, or Let Her Soar | 1 50 |
| The Baroness—Joaquin Miller | 1 50 | Nina's Peril—By Mrs. Miller | 1 50 |
| One Fair Woman. Do. | 1 50 | Marguerite's Journal—For Girls | 1 50 |
| The Burnhams—Mrs. G. E. Stewart | 2 00 | Orpheus C. Kerr—Four vols. in one | 2 00 |
| Eugene Ridgewood—Paul James | 1 50 | Spell-Bound—Alexandre Dumas. | 75 |
| Braxton's Bar—R. M. Daggett | 1 50 | Purple and Fine Linen—Fawcett | 1 50 |
| Miss Beck—By Tilbury Holt | 1 50 | Pauline's Trial—L. D. Courtney. | 1 50 |
| A Wayward Life | 1 00 | Tancredi—Dr. E. A. Wood | 1 50 |
| Winning Winds—Emerson | 1 50 | Measure for Measure—Stanley | 1 50 |
| The Fallen Pillar Saint—Best | 1 25 | A Marvellous Coincidence | 50 |
| An Errand Girl—Johnson | 1 50 | Two Men of the World—Bates | 50 |
| Ask Her, Man! Ask Her! | 1 50 | A God of Gotham—Bascom | 50 |
| Hidden Power—T. H. Tibbles | 1 50 | Congressman John—MacCarthy. | 50 |
| Two of Us—Calista Halsey | 75 | So Runs the World Away | 50 |
| Cupid on Crutches—A. B. Wood | 75 | The Bravest 500 of '61 | 3 50 |
| Parson Thorne—E. M. Buckingham | 1 50 | Heart Hungry. Mrs. Westmoreland | 1 50 |
| Errors—By Ruth Carter | 1 50 | Clifford Troupe. Do | 50 |
| The Social Revolution | 50 | Price of a Life—R. F. Sturgis | 1 50 |
| The Milton Tragedy | 50 | Marston Hall—L. Ella Byrd | 1 50 |
| The Abbess of Jouarre—Renan | 1 00 | Conquered—By a New Author | 1 50 |
| Bulwer's Letters to his Wife | | Tales from the Popular Operas. | 1 50 |
| Sense—A serious book. Pomeroy. | 1 50 | The Fall of Kilman Kon | 50 |
| Gold Dust. Do. | 1 50 | San Miniato—Mrs. C. V. Hamilton | 50 |
| Our Saturday Nights | Do. 1 50 | All for Her—A Tale of New York. | 1 50 |
| Nonsense—A comic book | Do. 1 50 | L'Assommoir—Zola's great novel | 1 00 |
| Brick-dust Do | Do. 1 50 | Vesta Vane—By L. King, R. | 1 50 |
| Home Harmonies | Do. 1 50 | Kimball's Novels. 6 vols | 1 [illegible] |

# MAY AGNES FLEMING'S

## Popular Novels.

The following is a list of the Novels by the Author of "GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE":

| | |
|---|---|
| SILENT AND TRUE. | CARRIED BY STORM. |
| A WONDERFUL WOMAN. | LOST FOR A WOMAN. |
| A TERRIBLE SECRET. | A WIFE'S TRAGEDY. |
| NORINE'S REVENGE. | A CHANGED HEART. |
| A MAD MARRIAGE. | PRIDE AND PASSION. |
| ONE NIGHT'S MYSTERY. | SHARING HER CRIME. |
| KATE DANTON. | A WRONGED WIFE. |
| GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE. | MAUDE PERCY'S SECRET. |
| HEIR OF CHARLTON. | THE ACTRESS' DAUGHTER. |
| THE QUEEN OF THE ISLE. | EDITH PERCIVAL (New). |

These volumes can be had at any bookstore in the cloth-bound library edition. Price $1.50.

"Mrs. Fleming's stories are growing more and more popular every day. Their delineations of character, lifelike conversations, flashes of wit, constantly varying scenes, and deeply interesting plots combine to place their author in the very first rank of modern novelists."

*All handsomely printed and bound in cloth, sold everywhere, and sent by mail, postage free, on receipt of price* ($1.50), *by*

G. W. DILLINGHAM, PUBLISHER,
**33 West 23rd Street, New York.**

PS2376
M8 F737
1894

# AUGUSTA J. EVANS'

## MAGNIFICENT NOVELS.

| | |
|---|---|
| **BEULAH,** | **$1.7** |
| **ST. ELMO,** | **2.00** |
| **INEZ,** | **1.75** |
| **MACARIA,** | **1.75** |
| **VASHTI,** | **2.00** |
| **INFELICE,** | **2.00** |
| **AT THE MERCY OF TIBERIUS,** | **2.00** |

**A Prominent Critic says of these Novels:**

"The author's style is beautiful, chaste, and elegant. Her ideals are clothed in the most fascinating imagery, and her power of delineating character is truly remarkable. One of the marked and striking characteristics of each and all her works is the purity of sentiment which pervades every line, every page, and every chapter."

*All handsomely printed and bound in cloth, sold everywhere, and sent by mail, postage free, on receipt of price, by*

G. W. DILLINGHAM, PUBLISHER,
33 West 23rd Street, New York.